

PREFACE.

Preface.

I BEG my reader's forgiveness for yet again having the temerity to introduce my kind of Preface but now the die is cast. It is my destiny to write Plays full of faults and bad Prefaces that limit the mediocre success that they may obtain on reading. Are men not generally blind regarding themselves? Some too knowing about themselves, others, unable to disabuse themselves, judge their faults too severely: do nearly all of them not cede to the leanings that urge them on? It will be pointed out to me no doubt that when one knows oneself so well, one must also know how to correct oneself, and renounce the art of writing when one is blessed only with a natural imagination that cannot please supposed connoisseurs, pedants and plagiarists. I would say to this type of man that everything springs from the bosom of ignorance, and that only the genius of nature has carried the arts and accomplishments to the point they have reached. The monuments left to us by the Ancients prove it incontrovertibly. Is it therefore any surprise that the Moderns, having studied these early models, have produced works where natural genius is seconded by all the resources of art? Should this diminish the gratitude and the veneration that we owe those early Writers who, through rough paths, traced on our behalf the broad and boundless career that we follow. Beginning at the same point from which they began, I come to a standstill on one of those paths, where no doubt my place is determined; I will take care not to make novel observations for fear of being led into philosophical reflections from which my feeble means would not permit me to extract any glory. It would provide some of our pedants and purists with new fodder to treat me with a barbaric rigour that discourages nascent talent, and makes a woman tremble. There are sages nonetheless, fair and enlightened men, who are born to understand the merit of producing even a feeble work and whose moderate censure is better suited to instruct rather than to intimidate. These are the equitable men whose judgement never belies itself: they have given

me the most sympathetic proof of this.¹ I call on them and crave for the indulgence that I am sure to obtain from them once they are convinced that I received the kind of education given at the time of the great Bayard; fate placed me in the most enlightened century, deprived of knowledge.² Thus I know very little; there are only a few notions that are not mixed up in my mind, and I have a great familiarity with the stage, without a notion of our Authors. M. de Belloy tells us that Gaston was born a General as Homer was born a Poet.³ I certainly am not prideful enough to place myself alongside these two great men but, based on their reading of my feeble works, I leave true connoisseurs to judge if I have in fact received from nature an innate seed of dramatic talent, which, developed and seconded by instruction, might have afforded me some distinction in this career. Thus, following my avowal, I may be allowed to glory in my ignorance and even to defy those who will want to criticise me, despite their general knowledge, which they often use very poorly, being superior to my own.

All those who are familiar with my feeble talents have persuaded me that a consummate man of letters gifted in the art of writing would greatly improve my productions. I ask for nothing better than to meet this man who would not disdain being associated with my work. But, this man, I say, he would have to exhibit good faith; he must not seek to usurp my subjects; satisfied to share the glory and the profit, he must only take the trouble to refine the style. I believe, without compromising myself, that the greatest reproach that can be laid at my feet is that I lack the art of writing with the elegance required nowadays. Reared in a land where the language is poorly spoken, and never having spoken it on principle, it is surprising that my diction is not even more

1 [Original footnote] See the Announcements of 12 January by M. L'Abbé Aubert; the *Mercure* of Saturday 4 March; the *Courier Lyrique* of 15 February; the *Journal de Nanci* [sic] of the same month.

2 The 'time of Bayard' was the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Pierre Terrail de Bayard (1475? - 1524) was a soldier known as 'le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche' (a blameless knight who knew no fear); these words became a catchphrase in France. Famed for his bravery and good character he became the model of chivalric virtue, standing up for the oppressed and shunning glory and riches. He broke his back in battle but provided cover for his retreating men stating that he must be left there to die for having never turned his back on the enemy he was not about to do so at the end.

Olympe de Gouges received the limited education afforded to girls of her provincial background in the mid-eighteenth century, and she spoke only her native regional language of Occitan well into her late teens.

3 Gaston de Foix-Nemours (1489 - 1512) was Louis XII nephew and was a famed general in his uncle's army, commanding the royal force in Italy. He was killed in battle at a very early age but had already established himself as one of the greatest strategists of his day. Pierre Laurent Buirette de Belloy (1717 - 1775), actor and playwright known as Dormont de Belloy, wrote a five act tragedy *Gaston et Bayard* in which he dramatises a moment in history when the two men were fighting in Italy. For information on Bayard see footnote 2.

defective.⁴ However if I believed that by adopting the manner of others, I might spoil the spontaneity that inspires me with new subjects, then I would renounce that which could be indispensable to me. Maybe, for the sake of novelty, I will be forgiven those faults of style, those phrases that are more sensitive than elegant and, that ultimately, all exude truth.

I have been reproached for my precipitation concerning my play *Chérubin*. I will modestly suggest that all beginners are always in a hurry and swayed by an ardour that can only be controlled by work. I am myself beginning to experience this slowing down of an imagination that was previously too prompt, and to be more discerning in my choice of subjects and the way in which I treat them. When I mentioned in the *Preface* to *The Marriage of Chérubin* my extreme facility I was only aiming to excuse the faults that nearly always accompany a first attempt. I do not even promise to correct myself entirely, and no doubt masterpieces will not be expected of me.

The Play that I am presenting to the Public today is surely more considered; in truth I gave it more than 24 hours. I am proud to say, once more, that connoisseurs among the literati have enthusiastically prevailed upon me to present it to the French, predicting it will have a most happy future. Oh joy, are you never to be mine, and will I yet again destroy, by depending on a single hope, the calm and peace that I enjoy at the *Comédie Française*! They were willing to embrace my first Work. A second broke the bond that they had created between us. A peaceable accommodation restored the situation to its former state, and I would sorely fear another disaster at a third reading. It is not a refusal that I apprehend, no doubt I will suffer more than one, but it is the obstacles, the unpleasantness, the uncertainty of being received, the cruel delay awaiting performance and the judicious fear of its subsequent failure. I will be told that if all Authors behaved similarly there would be no novelties in our theatres, but as there are those who are more patient and more courageous than

⁴ De Gouges, born in Montauban, came from an area where Occitan was the local language; French, which she probably did not speak regularly until her marriage, was her second language. Although pilloried by some for the poverty of her language skills she was, in fact, quite capable of reading and writing an accomplished French. The oral tradition of her early years imbues her texts with their sense of immediacy. In June 1794 Abbé Grégoire presented a report to the Convention nationale in which he asked for the suppression of all patois across France in favour of one common language. He found thirty active dialects and felt that these represented a feudal system that, though overturned, still shackled the patois speakers by limiting their access to any centralized education, legal system or public life.

I, my aims will in no way diminish the failures and rare successes of the theatrical stage, where our good Authors have left almost nothing to wish for, and where on occasion those who try something new are unfairly treated. Let me appear in print....let me appear in print then!....That at least is a delight that cannot be taken away from me. What about the Censor, they will say, and the Journalist critics, and the Booksellers' caprice...All that is nought if a theatrical work gains some endorsements on reading. Hey, do you give no credit to our Provincial theatres? Have not some of our best plays been performed there first? That is one hope that is left to me and if felicity would one day smile upon me, could I not see my *Homme Généreux* prosper at the *Théâtre Français* or the *Théâtre Italien*?

While I await the realisation of this agreeable dream I must indicate to those who will direct the play the necessary cuts. I fear that Madame de Valmont may pause too long on a subject that is of interest to her alone and this might spoil the action. One could also remove what Laurette says, as well as la Fontaine, and cleanse the Work of all that has no bearing on the play's substance. Objections will be raised, these are yet further difficulties. Why, I will be asked, insert themes that are foreign to the subject?

Another observation that I can offer may give the Drama a livelier interest. I can promise that most of the characters that I have drawn exist in today's society, like Madame de Valmont, the cruel la Fontaine, the Marquis de Flaucourt. As for the wise Marianne, the generous Count de S. Clair and the brave la Fleur, they may be assumed to be drawn from my imagination for in truth it is quite rare to find such pure souls in society. A mother will be able to bring her daughter to this play; young people will gain from it precepts which will guide them closer to that filial love, so rare these days.

The *Memoirs* and *Letters* that I am printing at the same time, gave me the idea for this Drama. These *Memoirs*, I say, demonstrate Madame de Valmont's misfortunes, the injustice and the cruelty of a rich and distinguished family, her blood relations, who have never done anything for her. This is what will make her interesting in my Play, and it is with good reason that I make her say those things that relate to her; no doubt she will touch those people who know little of these facts, and even more those who know of her misfortunes and her fate. It is to this that I wished to alert the readers.

As for Monsieur la Fleur allow me to offer him a modest space in this Preface, assured that the Public will generally applaud the enthusiastic admiration I have for one of our most famous actors to whom I owe the creation of this particular character.⁵ All those who read my Work were surprised by it, and could not conceive that it had manifested itself in a woman's imagination. I admit that I would not have thought of it if I had not based it on the astonishing Actor who was its model.

Just as we are about to lose this unique man, who leaves us with no hope of being replaced, I would like the Public, who admires his talents on a daily basis, to unite in order to retain him, despite himself, for just a few more years on the Stage. This irreparable loss, by diminishing the number of the few precious talents that are left to us, will increase the connoisseurs' regrets. I know this great *Comédien* only through the impression that he made upon me in the different roles I saw him fill with such success. My praise is thus disinterested, not having the slightest hope that I could see him in one of my Plays. Could one doubt his identity from the portrait I present of him? For my own satisfaction, it pleases me to trace here the various forms his talent takes, that seem to multiply every day. Imagine him as he painted the effects of drunkenness, a common enough type but very difficult to render in cold blood. Does not this Actor vary this same type, by maintaining the form of the characters and by perfectly answering to the Author's intentions? For example, in the *Mercure Galant*, in the *Roi de Cocagne* and in the doubles, did he not offer nuances and differing colours? Can one ever forget him in the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, in *Turcaret*, in *Figaro* and in *Le Legs*? In every role he is a different man. Then observe him in the grand livery, what wit, what finesse and truth!

Brusque and sensitive in the *Bourru bienfaisant*, a good servant in the *Philosophe sans le savoir*, and unique in Michau in the *Partie de chasse d'Henri IV*. I cannot see this man without renewed interest and when I think to myself that in a few months we will be deprived of him, transported by my admiration for true talent I weep tears at his retirement that we should all be deferring.

⁵ De Gouges is writing about Pierre-Louis Dubus aka Préville (1721 - 1799) an actor at the Comédie Française since 1753 who retired in 1786 (the year this play was written) after a successful career. He created lead roles in Beaumarchais's *Barber of Seville* in 1775 and in the *Marriage of Figaro* in 1784. His looks and personality made him a favourite at court. The playwright may have hoped that her eulogy would persuade him to stay and perform the part of La Fleur

Ah! If I could hope that in order to enliven his days, he would take on the virtuous la Fleur, by acting in this Play with his friends, how joyfully I would withdraw in solitude to doubly rejoice in the sweet pleasure of seeing him in the style of play that, helped by the magic of art, has made his natural talent inimitable.

ACTORS.

The Count de SAINT-CLAIR.

MARIANNE.

Young MONTALAIS, *Marianne's brother and the Count's secretary.*

Old MONTALAIS, *Marianne's father.*

Madame de VALMONT, *a young widow, the Count's friend and Marianne's protector.*

LA FONTAINE, *the Marquis de Flaucourt's vile agent.*

LA FLEUR, *a Recruiting Sergeant.*

GERMEUIL, *the Count's valet.*

LAURETTE, *Marianne's apprentice.*

The action takes place in Paris, at the Count's townhouse and at Marianne's lodgings.

L'HOMME GÉNÉREUX

DRAME.

The Honourable Man, a Drama.⁶

⁶ *L'Homme Généreux* (1786) is a five act drama closely linked to de Gouges's *Memoire de Madame Valmont*, placing the eponymous heroine of the *Memoire* at the heart of the play. The 'generous man' is a nobleman whose moral conundrum and emotional development thematically drive the pedagogic message of the work. Deception, attempted rape, societal power structures, the effects of poverty and debt, love both familial and romantic, these are the situations that have to be confronted before the generous man can see clearly where his heart and duty lie. One evil character comes perilously close to destabilising all. Good triumphs over evil in the end but only after deception, both general and of the self, has been abandoned in favour of honesty and cohesion. Evil loses its power when all right minded people set aside their imposed class and gender strictures and embrace their shared humanity. Bound with other plays, it featured in the 1788 edition of de Gouges's *Œuvres* but was not performed on the stage.

The play was based on a contemporary news report of a merchant whose sick wife and young family became destitute when he was imprisoned for debt. De Gouges sent the text to Mme. de Genlis, governess to the duc d'Orléans's two sons, whose charges were so moved by the narrative that they arranged for sums to be paid and the impoverished gentleman to be released. De Gouges attempted unsuccessfully to have the play performed so that she could donate the first six performances' box-office receipts to the family.

FIRST ACT.

The scene is set in a richly decorated cabinet, adorned with portraits and prints.

FIRST SCENE.

THE COUNT, alone, in an elegant dressing gown, is busy writing.

The Marquis de Flaucourt has left for his estates, without satisfying me with regard to his sister...what could I say to her? I yearn to see her.

It is at her townhouse that I saw that amiable person....Ah, Marianne, I see you everywhere! What is this invincible power of beauty? I have long withstood this frivolous sex; I had made a vow never to be subjugated by its charms. Can one glimpse alone make me thus abandon all my resolutions? Ah! Let reason recover its reign, let me find happiness in the charms of friendship; let me occupy myself making all those that surround me happy...; let me banish the memory of the adorable Marianne. But, can I efface from my mind her touching grace, her enchanting traits, her simple and noble deportment? No, never have I seen a person so designed to please; everything that is considered admirable and interesting is united in her....I fear Madame de Valmont, the young widow, has become aware of my unease. As virtuous as she is amiable, informed by the troubles of her earliest youth, she is all the more sensitive to the misfortune of others: philosophical on her own account, and ceaselessly working to soothe the pain of others, *she has given up the turmoil of the world*, to give herself up to the charms of literature. And graciously making fun of the foibles of youth, she believes she is old enough, she says, to become an Author. She protects Marianne, who is no doubt worthy of her esteem. This young person seems to indicate, by the simplicity of her dress, that she is destitute: if only I could soften her fate...! But I fear that my intentions will appear suspect, I dare not even question Madame de Valmont...Never mind, even if I have to admit to her the impression that Marianne has made upon me, I want to understand her situation...I will ask her for a rendezvous in this letter; let me get

it to her straightaway...Germeuil, what ho....; he's not coming....; the devil always makes one wait....Germeuil! Germeuil!

SCENE II.

THE COUNT, GERMEUIL.⁷

GERMEUIL, *running in.*

Sir, here I am, at your orders, M. le Marquis de Flaucourt has just left.

THE COUNT.

I saw him from my apartment, getting into his coach; no doubt it won't be for long but I am surprised that living in the same house, he has departed without a word to me. Germeuil, take this letter to Madame de Valmont, and tell her that I await her reply.

GERMEUIL.

Straightaway.

THE COUNT.

Before you go, tell my Secretary that I wish to speak to him.

GERMEUIL.

Your Secretary, Sir! Ah well, he is already far away. He knows that you do not receive in the morning so doubtless he is about his own little affairs.

THE COUNT.

Until now I have not had to complain of his zeal and his assiduity, but what surprises me, on his count, is to see him poorly dressed

⁷ Throughout the play the Count uses the familiar 'tu' when addressing his servant; Germeuil always uses the formal 'vous' when addressing the Count.

despite the advantages he has here. La Fontaine, his protector, the one who found him for me, assured me that he was an orphan, without any connections. I did not make any other enquiries; his candid and honest demeanour has always spoken sufficiently in his favour and inspires me to have the greatest confidence in him.

GERMEUIL.

I have nothing to add concerning this young man, like yourself I believe him to be an honest youth. But, Sir, allow me to observe...How did you come to rely on the good faith of the one who offered him to you? I know him, he is the greatest liar by far...!

THE COUNT.

I did not know him in this light at the time, and, having seen nothing in young Montalais that could inspire in me any distrust, nothing obliged me to cast doubt upon him.

GERMEUIL.

The Marquis de Flaucourt, Madame de Valmont's brother, follows all the perfidious la Fontaine's advice to the letter, in defiance of his entire family. This adventurer claims to be the descendant of a Grandee of Spain, although people who know better affirm that he is the fruit of an illegitimate commerce between people of lowly birth. Is this not, Sir, a fine pedigree with which to call oneself a friend of the Marquis de Flaucourt! I would not wish to criticise his birth for it is not for me, a simple valet, to denigrate the genealogy of my equals. But I do not count among them a villain of this sort and even below stairs man can achieve distinction through finer feelings.

THE COUNT.

I agree with you, Germeuil. A servant who thinks like you, and is as judicious in his reasoning, is always sure to be esteemed by his master. But tell me, what do you think of my Secretary?

GERMEUIL.

Truthfully, Sir, to be perfectly frank, although I have a good opinion of this young man, I fear that he may be friends with that dangerous la Fontaine.

THE COUNT.

I wish to examine them more closely and I charge you to watch their behaviour. Don't lose any time, go and deliver this letter and, on your return, I will inform you of my intentions.

GERMEUIL.

I'm on my way.

He exits.

SCENE III.

THE COUNT, *alone.*

The Marquis de Flaucourt had his reasons for not telling me about his journey; he knows that I would not approve of his conduct towards his sister. But here is la Fontaine; let me dissemble and try and understand this shadowy soul.

SCENE IV.

THE COUNT, LA FONTAINE.

LA FONTAINE.

Here, Sir, is a letter that the Marquis charged me to give you when he left.

THE COUNT, *taking the letter, looks at it disdainfully as he breaks the seal.*

No doubt, Monsieur de la Fontaine, you know what it contains?

LA FONTAINE.

I am not the Marquis de Flaucourt's Secretary, I am his friend.

THE COUNT.

One hides nothing from such a faithful friend. But, speaking of Secretaries, you found me one in whom I have the greatest faith.

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

This is not as I would wish.

THE COUNT.

I admit that I value him most highly; I will share with you a plan that he conceived perfectly suited to interest mankind. [*Aside.*] I'll have to dig deep to discover what I need to know about him.

He enters his library.

SCENE V.

LA FONTAINE, *alone*.

By placing Montalais in the Count de Saint-Clair's household my sole aim was to distance him from his father's home, because he was getting in the way of my designs on his sister...I suggested he was an orphan; my interests and his, though different, oblige us to maintain this delusion in the Count's mind. But, if fortune were to favour him, he would share it with his family and then I would see all my plans destroyed, and I would lose the fruits of my labour....No, if Marianne were to ignore my attentions I would still force him to renounce the Count's blessings. The Marquis de Flaucourt is infatuated with her; if she behaves well with me, I could make a Marquise of her...That giddy young man only listens to his ardour, and blindly follows my goading....It is thanks to my advice that he

left for his estates, where he will stay for a few days. I am master in his house, I will make the most of his absence, and his gold, and on his return he will find that everything is suitably arranged. All that is left to me is to find a way to arrange a rendezvous between me and Marianne. [*Thinking.*] In the Marquis's actual apartment. Yes, her innocent eyes will be dazzled by the luxurious display; her parents will not raise difficulties, I have gained their confidence, they will let her accompany me....What do I care for the Count's project?

He goes as if to exit.

SCENE VI.

LA FONTAINE, young MONTALAIS.

Young MONTALAIS.

Sir!....Oh my protector! If you abandon me I am lost!

LA FONTAINE.

Whatever is wrong, my dear Montalais? You seem very agitated.

Young MONTALAIS.

Alas! You find me much troubled, I am desperate. You know my family's misfortunes; I was so happy in my position; my remuneration sufficed to soften the fate to which the authors of my days have been reduced for so long; you know that my poor sister contributes alongside me, by her handiwork, to shelter them from the horrors of destitution: my poor father had divested himself of all his means in favour of his creditors but, alas! the most pitiless of them all has never accepted any kind of arrangement; after ten years he has the barbarity to threaten this respectable old man with dreadful imprisonment.

LA FONTAINE, *aside.*

Good! That will suit my plans perfectly. [*Aloud.*] And what is this creditor's name?

Young MONTALAIS.

Durand Banker.⁸

LA FONTAINE.

That's enough.

Young MONTALAIS.

Alas! I was tempted to throw myself at the Count de Saint-Clairs's feet and make all my troubles known to him.

LA FONTAINE, *hypocritically.*

Young man, guard against it; you would be lost in the opinion of the Count. He is a man who, with a show of goodness, hides a hard heart. Remember that I placed you with him as an orphan; if he were to discover today that you have a family, he would find you suspect and I would be compromised....Here he is; be on your guard.

SCENE VII.

LA FONTAINE, young MONTALAIS, THE COUNT.

THE COUNT, *from the back of the stage holding a piece of paper.*

Here they are, both of them. Excellent! [*He moves forward speaking to young Montalais.*] I have just told Monsieur of your project; I find it quite well thought out and your work exhibits as much sense as virtue; compassion shines through it all. If the Government and the Public cannot adopt your plan at least they will applaud the patriotic zeal that inspires you.

⁸ In the original text 'Banker' appears to be part of the man's (comic?) name, but typographical errors being frequent, it is possible that a comma is missing in which case 'Banker' might be describing his trade.

Young MONTALAIS, *sighing*.

Alas! The greatest concern inspired me when I created it; only an unfortunate man could describe the dangers to which the poor are exposed.

THE COUNT, *placing the paper on a desk*.

Your parents must have been subjected to many difficulties for them to have abandoned you so young in straitened circumstances. For someone from a poor family you seem to have been raised well, and your education was not overlooked.

LA FONTAINE.

I did tell you, Sir, that he was an orphan and that kind people took care of him in his childhood.

THE COUNT.

Happy are they who offered their benevolence so wisely!...But I was speaking to him. Answer me, Montalais; I offered you a place in my household with the greatest trust; in the two months since you arrived I have not questioned you in any way, but since I have provided for your needs, why do you appear in this same state of impoverishment? You oblige me to suspect your behaviour.....you are troubled, make all known to me and your judge will be your friend.

Young MONTALAIS.

Ah! Sir, I would be unworthy of your goodness if my conduct were irregular. To live happily by your side without being virtuous would be, for me, an impossible feat.

THE COUNT, *aside*.

I cannot deny him; his candour is heartfelt.

Young MONTALAIS.

My happiness would be complete if it were not poisoned by the image of the misery of those who are so dear to me.

THE COUNT, *surprised*.

You told me you were without family?

LA FONTAINE, *with trickery*.

He means his friends. No doubt one of them is at this moment unhappy. He has a sensitive soul, and not being able to remedy their ills....

Young MONTALAIS, *interrupting him*.

Alas! You describe what I am feeling; it is the misfortune of others that makes my life unhappy. [*Crying*.] It is tearing my soul apart.

THE COUNT.

It is a fine thing to have a sensitive heart, but when one cannot assuage the pains of others, one must be able to limit one's sensibility. If it were for a father or a mother, I could not fault your affliction.

Young MONTALAIS, *moved*.

Ah, Sir, if you knew....

LA FONTAINE, *interrupting him, whispering*.

What are you doing, will you lose everything?

Young MONTALAIS, *aside, looking at la Fontaine*.

What a terrible constraint! [*Aloud to the Count.*] Oh Sir, my protector; the best of men; if only I could reveal to you all my sorrows. I will retire and leave you with my first benefactor; he knows my situation, and better than I, he can inform you of my woes.

He exits, the Count watches him leave.

SCENE VIII.

LA FONTAINE, THE COUNT.

LA FONTAINE, *aside.*

No doubt he'll question me about Montalais: let me put forward his supposed faults and deprive him of the Count's esteem.

THE COUNT.

Sir, you must explain yourself more clearly than you have until now. You provided my Secretary, and to me quite frank with you, I have confidence in him; it would be greater still if you did not block its progress; in one word, I distrust you in everything.

LA FONTAINE.

Sir, I am astonished that you should address me in this way; you have always honoured me with your respect.

THE COUNT.

I will admit that you did inspire me thus, but all that I hear on your account fills me with the greatest misgivings regarding your character. It is said that you damned Madame de Valmont in her brother's opinion; that in the family of the Marquis de Flaucourt you blackened this young widow.

LA FONTAINE, *audaciously.*

It is Madame to Valmont who casts these aspersions on me. If her conduct had been more regular it would not have affected her reputation.

THE COUNT.

This odious justification is worthy of you, but he who only takes pleasure in evil is incapable of rendering justice to those who deserve it.

LA FONTAINE, *spitefully*.

Eh, in what way have I wronged her! What are her rights? You know them, Sir; they are very slight.

THE COUNT, *with feeling*.

It is your words that are worthless. What are her rights! Can any be stronger than those of nature? But a wicked man has never sympathised with nature.

LA FONTAINE.

Sir?

THE COUNT.

Monsieur la Fontaine?

LA FONTAINE.

I am the descendant of a Grandee of Spain.

THE COUNT.

For a descendant of a Grandee of Spain you have a very petty soul.

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

Let me settle this effrontery. [*Aloud.*] Monsieur le Marquis de Flaucourt knows me in another guise.

THE COUNT.

He will know you better by and by, and if his soul is not totally corrupted by your odious principles, one day he will know how to judge you as you deserve. But let us cease this altercation, and give me a brief answer regarding Montalais; you know the cause of his pain. What is it?

LA FONTAINE, *aside.*

Let me forestall the young man's indiscretion, and may it turn to his disadvantage. [*Aloud, hypocritically.*] Well, Monsieur, it is time that I made myself known. You have judged me on false reports; I wouldn't know how to oblige you to think more highly of me. Excessive goodness made me hold my peace but I compromised myself; it is pointless to hide from you, any longer, your Secretary's disorderly conduct. This young Montalais, that I myself believed to be so virtuous, is nothing but a libertine who has made the acquaintance of suspect people whose daughter he supports. [*Aside.*] I have to risk everything to further my projects and protect myself.

THE COUNT.

What are you saying? [*With good humour.*] But you will do me the pleasure of keeping nothing from me; I would like, if I can, to return this young man to his duty.

LA FONTAINE, *surprised and aside.*

Let me carry on and deal the final blow. [*Aloud.*] He is incapable of change; you see how he is; all the perquisites that he has received from you, he gives them unreservedly to this girl.

THE COUNT.

So she is a girl of ill repute?

LA FONTAINE.

She can be no other.

THE COUNT.

Her name?

LA FONTAINE.

I've heard it said that he called her Marianne.

THE COUNT, *aside*.

Marianne!

LA FONTAINE.

He pretends she is his sister; he even planned to tell you that his family was a mystery, and he tried to persuade me to endorse his ideas in order that you be duped by his hypocrisy. You are intelligent, Sir, reflect on what [*Words missing in the original text.*] and you will judge, Sir, if you are entitled to suspect me.

LE COUNT, *dreamily distracted*.

Marianne, did you say?

LA FONTAINE, *surprised*.

Are you acquainted with this girl?

THE COUNT.

No doubt I know someone who bears the same name; everything points to her being virtuous and candid, I would guarantee that she

is as wise as she is beautiful. This Marianne is surely not the one you have mentioned to me.

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

What have I said? If this were Montalais's sister....let me dissimulate and attempt to find out. [*Aloud.*] Where did you meet her, Sir? I will soon tell you....

THE COUNT.

That is my secret, and if she is the same....

LA FONTAINE, *hurriedly*.

Well?

THE COUNT, *tenderly*.

Well, I would make it propitious for Marianne and Montalais.

LA FONTAINE.

You would consider uniting them? [*Aside.*] He doesn't scare me, but I fear that all will be discovered. [*Aloud.*] Sir, would you entrust me to observe their behaviour; I promise that before the day is out I will inform you sufficiently for you to know if you should take an interest in them.

THE COUNT.

I would be indebted to you if you could tell me whether or not they are worthy of my support. I wish to meet this girl and her parents: poverty can sometimes give the wrong impression.

LA FONTAINE, *hypocritically*.

Ah, Monsieur, your words are too true.

THE COUNT.

Could you really believe in virtue? Your benevolent look would persuade me, if I did not know you better.

LA FONTAINE, *hypocritically*.

Sir, I dare flatter myself that you will know me better in the future. He who has nothing to fear allows time to justify his behaviour.

THE COUNT.

Enough, I will discover if you have in fact been falsely judged; I will be the first to revise an unjust preconception; bring me a faithful account of this family's position.

LA FONTAINE.

Above all, Sir, the young man must remain ignorant of our project for it would do him no good, and if we find that he is mistaken, then we can try and extricate him, without his being aware of it.

THE COUNT.

That is prudent, I approve of such behaviour.

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

Things are going according to my wishes. [*Aloud.*] I am going, right away, to take care of it all.

He exits.

SCENE IX.

THE COUNT, *alone*.

Might Madame de Valmont have formed a poor opinion of him that is too harsh? A sensitive woman does not always delve deeply into

matters, and sometimes makes judgements on first impressions too freely...Germeuil does not return....what is retaining him? Let me reread Montalais's plan. [*He sits down and scans the writing.*] This article is well conceived....let me read on.... I find it insightful.

SCENE X.

THE COUNT, MADAME DE VALMONT.

Madame de VALMONT, *from the back of the stage, laughing.*

Here he is at last, I went through enough rooms before finding him.

THE COUNT, *surprised.*

What, is it you, Madame de Valmont!

Madame de VALMONT.

Yes, Count; it is I.

THE COUNT.

Could none of my lackeys save you the trouble of coming to unearth me in the depths of my cabinet?⁹....You find me in my dressing-gown...

Madame de VALMONT.

Ah, yes, I wanted to surprise you; your servants tried to stop me coming in but I am like the King's men, I enter everywhere.

THE COUNT.

One beholds you with greater pleasure than those Gentlemen. But I do not forgive your coming to me for the rendezvous that I had

⁹ The French term 'cabinet' - a small private room - can be translated as cabinet, closet or study. 'Study' which is commonly understood to be such a room nowadays, was not used as such in the 18th century so I have not used it in this translation.

asked of you. [*Aside.*] First let me speak to her about her brother, and then I will enquire regarding Marianne.

Madame de VALMONT.

I went out early this morning. But tell me, what is this about? I have just heard that my brother has left for his estate.

THE COUNT, *aside*.

He was secretive about it and after his departure, I received a note from him whose expressions were as cold as they were vague. [*Aloud.*] But do you believe, Madame, that la Fontaine is as abominable a man as you have been given to understand?

Madame de VALMONT.

Ah! I am convinced he is even more odious than all that can be said of him. My brother is an ingrate, yet I cannot, despite the wrongs he has done me, help loving him. It pains me to see, or rather to learn, that he behaves most indecently towards his family, notably with regard to his mother, though it is in his interest to attend to her for the greater part of his wealth comes from her side. This devout soul could well feel obliged, in all conscience, to disinherit a son who appears to enjoy making fun of her wise remonstrances. There is only one way to return my brother to his former self; that would be to find him an amiable companion who could settle him, a worthy spouse who would force him to renounce his vile agent.

THE COUNT.

I agree with you.

Madame de VALMONT.

I love my brother despite, as you know, a cruel fate poisoning for me the charm of fraternal love. A victim of prejudice, my father abandoned me in my crib, and time weakened his paternal feelings. My brother has his fortune, his name; all that is left to me of this

great man who brought us both into existence, is the elevation of his soul and a few sparks of his genius.

THE COUNT.

You are his living image, you have his wit, the nobility of his sentiments, but he tarnished his glory by allowing the veil of error to blind him.

Madame de VALMONT.

It is the veil of fanaticism. His wife is responsible. He forgot that he once had feelings and that he had led my unfortunate mother astray. He died forgetting that he left to the world a daughter who idolised him.

THE COUNT.

Your brother must correct the wrongs he did you.

Madame de VALMONT.

He seemed to have the feelings of a good brother, before he was his own master. I received from him the first sad news concerning the loss of the author of our days. 'My sister', he wrote to me, 'death has just taken our father from us but I outlive him to rectify the injustices you suffered at his hands for so long; you know my feelings towards you, they will never change.' But imagine my surprise when I learnt that he had been in Paris for quite a while and was avoiding me, thanks to the advice of that odious monster! Do you wish me to still doubt his insidious plots; I plan to unmask him; he is liar and the greatest danger to society. It seemed that Moliere [sic], thanks to his *Tartuffe*, had stifled the seed of those pernicious beings that we still see grow among us. No doubt such a horrible character did not come from his creative genius, he found him in the real world and, if I may take the liberty of imitating this great man, I have, like him, to paint the same character.

THE COUNT.

Your intention is admirable. A contrast to this horrible man, would be that pleasing girl I saw at your house the other day; you called her Marianne. Who is she? She is quite intriguing.

Madame de VALMONT, *gaily*.

Well I never, has my dear Marianne attracted your attention? Ah! that doesn't surprise me, she is so pretty, so sweet, so good!

THE COUNT.

So many virtues in one!

Madame de VALMONT.

Yes without a doubt, and my Marianne possesses others that are even worthier. She lives in the bosom of poverty, and devotes the fruits of her labours to supporting her mother and father.

THE COUNT.

This tallies with what la Fontaine told me about Marianne.

Madame de VALMONT.

What are you saying? Could such a virtuous girl know this depraved man? I beg you, explain yourself. What has he told you about her? I fear that my brother may be implicated in all of this.

THE COUNT.

Perhaps it is not the same person for he assured me that she was a girl of dubious merit, one to whom my Secretary was strongly attached: everything leads me to believe it, for this young man has nothing despite my offering him many perquisites.

Madame de VALMONT.

Ah! I breathe again; that is not like Marianne.

THE COUNT.

I am convinced of it: but do you think that a girl, young, beautiful and poor?...

Madame de VALMONT.

Yes, Sir, I understand. Eh! Thus is our poor sex exposed. Men have all the advantages; one has seen those from the lowest position gain the greatest fortune, and sometimes rank: and women, without work, that is assuming they are virtuous, remain in poverty. We have been excluded from all power, all learning; happily, it hasn't yet been suggested that we be prevented from writing.

THE COUNT.

No, and I don't believe that it will ever be considered.

Madame de VALMONT.

Who knows? In this frivolous century we are becoming effective and the cabal against us is formidable. The few could well succumb.

THE COUNT.

In all times, women have written, and there are some who have been immortalised by the elegance of their style and the delights of the feeling they display in their Works.

Madame de VALMONT.

My dear Count, your manners and principles are still steeped in a better past; I see few like yourself who maintain the true character of the French. Today this noble occupation is ridiculed, we are even denied the opportunity to create our feeble productions. But, it is getting late and pressing affairs oblige me to leave you.

THE COUNT.

Allow me, Madame, before you leave, to ask you for a few details concerning the fate of this virtuous girl. [*Aside.*] If I could charge Madame de Valmont with a sum.....

Madame de VALMONT.

She lives quietly in a suburb with her mother and father; a little seamstress collects and brings her work. This amiable girl is ceaselessly gainfully employed; her conversation is the image of pure candour itself, of wisdom and filial piety, and I have to admit to you that her rare virtue edifies me as much as it enchants me. This respectable girl seems to flee the advantages that she could find in the world. There, that is all I know about the amiable child....But you remind me, I promised to pay her a visit, as I have engagements in that neighbourhood, I will bend my steps there right away.

THE COUNT, *looking at himself.*

If I were in a fit state to give you my arm I would accompany you.

Madame de VALMONT.

I have no doubt you would. Meanwhile I am far from clear why you would consider it.

THE COUNT.

I will not deny it. This adorable girl is constantly on my mind, and the touching portrait you paint of her makes me interested in her fate. Not that I feel any desires that could alarm her virtue, you would not believe it of me, but if, without being made known, I could soften her misfortune, then it is you that I would charge with my goodwill; these are my intentions and I have no others.

Madame de VALMONT.

Ah, I can believe it. I recognise you by these noble proceedings. How removed from such generosity are our wealthy men! To encourage virtue, that is an honest man's most worthy care. Adieu, I will undertake the honourable duty that you demand of me.

The Count gives his hand to Madame de Valmont to see her out; they stop on seeing Germeuil enter.

SCENE XI.

THE COUNT, Madame de VALMONT, GERMEUIL.

GERMEUIL, *to Madame de Valmont.*

Madame, I waited for you in vain, but your people are so polite.... [*Here Germeuil gives the impression that he has passed the time drinking.*] that time seems to fly.

Madame de VALMONT.

I am grateful that my people treated you well, Germeuil.

GERMEUIL.

I can answer to that and it is, Madame, with pleasure that your servant can give you thanks for it.

Madame de VALMONT, *going to exit.*

Sir, your Germeuil's a joker.

THE COUNT.

Yes, he would make quite a good Valet in a provincial Comedy.

GERMEUIL.

And in Paris too, I'll be bound.

Laughing, Madame de Valmont exits with the Count.

SCENE XII.

GERMEUIL, *alone.*

They scorn me. So what? I'll make them laugh, and always faithfully serve my Master. It must be said that Madame de Valmont's Lady's Maid is most kind and had not duty called I would have further awaited her Mistress. If we could arrange things with a good marriage....A good marriage! Is there such a thing? Since Masters have divorced, Valets imitate them. That is what they call a bad example.

SCENE XIII.

GERMEUIL, THE COUNT.

THE COUNT.

Let everything be prepared for me to get dressed; I must go out straight away.

GERMEUIL.

Everything is ready.

THE COUNT.

After you.

Germeuil exits.

SCENE XIV.

THE COUNT, *alone.*

I can breathe at last. I have found a way to help this young person. I don't have to blush at my feelings; it's not love that is making me

obey these blind transports, it's virtue that's guiding and enlightening me, it's the pleasure of making others happy that's inspiring me. If Montalais is wronging me then I will consider him to be lost. Yet I will not, for all that, favour the one who informed on him; for ever, my door will be closed to these two sorry subjects. If it is not that Marianne, what do I care for the other one? [*He reflects.*] What a mistake! I am blind to myself. I am in love and I want to be generous. Can a man never know himself. Always, despite his best efforts, some unworthy motive tarnishes the purity of his actions. If only I had known of this girl's misfortune before I had seen her! Ah, perhaps I would have been less interested in her. But never mind, I will stifle my feelings, triumph over my passion, and do good without gratifying my love. I will not even seek out a moment to see once more this adorable object; my pleasure at her happiness, will be my satisfaction.

He exits.

SCENE XV.

Young MONTALAIS *enters by the opposite wing and watches the Count leave.*

Alas, what can I do? He's leaving. Should I follow him? I don't know what to do. Monsieur la Fontaine is mistaken, and the Count de Saint-Clair is a perfect gentleman. My agitation at such foreboding is beyond description. A secret terror is seizing my soul. Would the Count be angry with me, if I admitted to him that I have a father, a mother and a respectable sister? Will he blame me, when he discovers how I use his generous gifts? Right, I will.....But, no, I would be compromising M. de [sic] la Fontaine. Meanwhile my father is in danger. And what do I do, wretched as I am? I make a thousand resolutions, without deciding on any. Yet I must determine what to do, time is pressing. Let me first save my father from his creditor's charges. I'll hide him in a secure place, out of Paris if required. But how will I bear this extra cost? I'm completely lacking in resources. [*He looks at himself.*] I will pawn my effects, I will pawn myself. There, that is the only thing left to do, and I fly to it.

End of the first Act.

ACT II.

The scene changes to show an impoverished household's room; at the back are two glazed doors, a line hung with washing, and a table used for ironing. Marianne, on one side of the stage, with an embroidery hoop on her lap, mends lace; old Montalais on the other side, sits reading a pamphlet, leaning on his elbow at a small table.

FIRST SCENE.

Old MONTALAIS, LAURETTE, MARIANNE.¹⁰

LAURETTE *singing*.

Nanette into the woods, goes a-jumping:
Picking and cracking the hazel nuts:
A big bad wolf comes along.
A big bad wolf comes along....
Goodness, I can't remember what comes next.

MARIANNE.

She runs away in an instant.

LAURETTE.

Oh! She did the right thing! I would have done the same in her place.

MARIANNE.

She's mad! She's happy.

¹⁰ In this scene Laurette is addressed by the familiar 'tu', she responds with the formal 'vous'. Marianne addresses her father using 'vous', he addresses her using 'tu'. This was customary in many middle and upper class French families until the mid-twentieth century. The pattern of address between the father and daughter remains the same though when he is addressing his son he uses both 'tu' and 'vous', sometimes in the same speech: 'vous' implies authority and occurs when the father is hoping to impose his views on his son. The siblings address each other using 'tu'.

Old MONTALAIS.

What, have you forgotten the song, and the handsome Shepherd who came along to console her?

LAURETTE.

Ah, that's true: you see, I had forgotten the best bit.

Old MONTALAIS.

Be careful, Laurette and remember that a Shepherd can be more dangerous for a young woman than a wolf: be afraid of the one and beware the other.

LAURETTE.

I know that well enough, you've often told me so.

Old MONTALAIS.

One can never repeat it too often.

MARIANNE.

And one cannot hear it often enough: but don't sing so loud, you know that my poor mother is unwell.

LAURETTE

It's because she's unhappy: I'm quite sure I'll cheer her up. You've been sad for several days, and I don't know why.

Old MONTALAIS, *aside*.

Alas, everyone would soon know our troubles, if we didn't hide them from the rashness of her youth. Can I hope that my son has obtained some deferment on the part of the cruel Durand? Oh my

poor children, you only prolong my sorrows without being able to save me from the fatal blow that threatens me.

MARIANNE.

Father, you sadden me. Stop making yourself miserable: let us await my brother's return.

Old MONTALAIS, *aside*.

It's not for myself that I am alarmed. I'll try not to make her pain worse. *Aloud*. I hope he will bring us good news.....Sing, Laurette.

LAURETTE.

Oh, I don't feel like it anymore, but I'd like to tell you what I saw at that pretty Lady's, the one who shares my name and who you know well.

MARIANNE.

Ah, I know, it's that young woman, always tormented by the vapours, who lives with her father; we haven't been working for him very long.

LAURETTE.

That's right. Oh, she's so kind and her father is very polite! As she likes frills and furbelows he calls her ragbag, even though her real name is Laurette, like me. She's a child, oh but a good child. She has a minute waist, big black eyes and equally dark beautiful eyebrows; she is good and has a sweet soft voice. 'I am sick,' she says. Her father used to say to her, when I was there: 'Eh, what's the matter, my Laurette?' 'It's gurgling, there', she replied, touching her stomach. [*Abandoning her work.*] But would you mind, Mademoiselle Marianne, telling me what that means, gurgling.

MARIANNE *aside*.

Despite my worries I can't help laughing at her simplicity. [*Aloud.*]
Ask my father, dear friend.

LAURETTE.

And you, Monsieur Montalais, I'm sure you know.

Old MONTALAIS.

I don't know the significance of it. Conversation is now like fashion: expressions are introduced that are not in the Dictionary.

LAURETTE.

Won't this one be put in? I find it very pretty. Gurgling!....Ah, I'll remember it a long time.

Old MONTALAIS.

Apparently this Lady is a little Miss.

LAURETTE.

Ah, if little Misses are like her, then I can assure you, they are very agreeable: she doesn't look down on the poor of this world, nor does her dear father either: he often says, quite rightly, in my presence, that if she had a bit of hardship, as I do, she would be less sickly. 'That may well be,' she said in a sourish tone, but I felt really sorry to see her suffering in that way. Then that famous Milliner arrived. Oh, how she pleased her with her hats and flower BARRIERE!¹¹ She tried on this one, she tried on that one; none of them suited her, yet all of them suited her....Ah, I can assure you that she no longer needed a Doctor.

Old MONTALAIS.

¹¹ A 'barrière' was a fashionable garland addition to wigs and millinery in 1770s and could be made of pearls, beads, or in this case artificial flowers. The making of these flowers was a thriving and long-established craft in France, worthy of an entry in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Much of the piecework involved was done by impoverished women and girls at home. England's artificial flower trade developed later when emigrant French flower makers fled the revolution, bringing their expertise to the UK. By the mid 19th century many hundreds of London children were employed in sweatshop conditions making these beautiful artefacts.

What a good remedy for a patient in the refined world, a fine hat! Didn't you want to have one too?

LAURETTE.

Come on now, you're joking! Would it do? For me?

MARIANNE.

You are right, my dear Laurette; these ornaments are not made for poor girls like us. Virtue alone must adorn us. Everything looks fine on the rich, who allow Workers to earn what they have in excess.

LAURETTE.

We would be really unhappy if most of the world didn't spend: we would have nothing to do.

Old MONTALAIS.

There's more philosophy in what you say than you might think, my child.

MARIANNE.

Yes, father, for if all humans were equal, there would be fewer suffering hardship.

Old MONTALAIS.

Who knows, and who will ever know? Birth and death are the same for us all, but we live life differently. The destitute sees death without fear, the rich frets about it every minute of the day: one trails boredom within the bosom of pleasure; the other brings joy to the heart of his family.

MARIANNE.

You are right, father; but do you think that all those whom fortune has favoured have corrupted souls? I think there are wealthy people who are sensitive to the plight of the destitute. For example, Madame de Valmont is the most estimable woman. How well she deliberates! How compassionate she is! Her friends are like her. The last time I had the honour of paying her a visit I saw a man there....Ah, father, he expressed himself in such an interesting way! He only spoke of charity, of the luxury of some and the misery of others. His words made such an impression on me, that this respectable man is constantly on my mind.

Old MONTALAIS, *aside*.

Alas, what is she telling me? If her heart....No,no, my daughter is guileless and would not hide the truth from me. *Aloud*. Is this a young man?

MARIANNE.

Yes, father; he's between thirty-six and forty.

Old MONTALAIS.

You have never told me, Marianne, if marriage would disgust you.

MARIANNE.

Very much, father.

Old MONTALAIS.

If a party suggested himself, a little like the person that you are describing to me, would you refuse him?

MARIANNE.

But father that is not possible.

Old MONTALAIS.

I'm not suggesting someone who would be superior to us in rank or condition, but if he were our equal, Marianne?

MARIANNE.

And he'd resemble this person in every way, father?

LAURETTE, *approaching*.

Let me listen to this.

Old MONTALAIS.

Well, Marianne?

MARIANNE, *lowering her gaze*.

Well, father, I think I would accept him.

Old MONTALAIS, *aside*.

My daughter is unaware of her feelings and I must not enlighten her further.

LAURETTE.

Ah, I hear Monsieur Montalais. *She moves to the front of the stage*.

MARIANNE.

Father, here is my brother.

Old MONTALAIS.

Alas, I feel the opposite to what I said just now. For the first time I tremble on seeing my son. What will he tell us?

SCENE II.

Old MONTALAIS, LAURETTE, MARIANNE, young MONTALAIS.

Young MONTALAIS, *to Laurette*.

Leave us, Laurette, leave us.

LAURETTE, *sulking*.

Are you sending me out again! You must have great secrets to share. You're always mistrustful of me, Monsieur Montalais.

Young MONTALAIS.

No, my dear Laurette, no; but I need to talk to my father and my sister. Go off and sit with my mother.

LAURETTE.

I'm going.

She exits quietly, looking back.

SCENE III.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE.

Young MONTALAIS *watching Laurette leaving*.

Old MONTALAIS.

Ah well, my friend, what have you managed? What have you obtained?

Young MONTALAIS.

Father, you see me in the deepest despair.

MARIANNE.

I tremble.

Old MONTALAIS.

What a state you're in! What have you done, poor soul? [*He looks him up and down from top to toe.*] Why do you appear so dishevelled?

Young MONTALAIS.

I beg you, father, don't pay attention to my condition; I kept my head just in order to save you. The only means left to us to save you from your creditor's pursuit is for you to follow me. Here are a hundred *écus*: do not ask at what price I obtained this sum; it is enough to take you to a safe haven. [*He pulls from his pocket a small bag of silver.*]

Old MONTALAIS.

My son, let me follow my destiny. I am approaching the last stage of my life; I am nearly seventy. I have lived in adversity: Heaven has given me virtuous children who have protected me and consoled me in my misery: I suffer only on your behalf, my dear children. What is my liberty to me? I haven't committed a crime; I'm sure I won't be deprived of the pleasure of seeing you occasionally.

MARIANNE, *throwing her arms around his neck.*

Oh father, dear author of our days, can you imagine that your children would ever let you be torn from their arms? What then, an appalling prison would become your home at the end of your days! We wouldn't be with you all the time, to offer you the care that our tenderness dictates! Ah, the thought revolts me and my soul cannot bear it.

Old MONTALAIS.

Calm yourself, my dear Marianne. Do you think I am insensible to your pain, and that I could doubt my children's tenderness? Alas! It is my only consolation in this state to which I am reduced.

Young MONTALAIS.

I will throw myself at the Count's feet; I will confess who I am, I will tell him of our misfortunes; he is virtuous, generous and compassionate, and it will please him to find the means to do a good deed.

Old MONTALAIS.

Listen to me, my son: I am more experienced than you; the Count is the most respectable and wise man, but he may find your conduct suspect. Our friend, Monsieur la Fontaine, thought it proper to introduce you as an orphan; no doubt he reasoned thus on our behalf: he would be compromised if you were to belie him now. Both of you would lose your fellow feelings for each other entirely. I know the Great and the Good. It's never easy to make them review their opinion of someone, once they have received a bad impression.

Young MONTALAIS.

But he respects me.

Old MONTALAIS.

And soon he will despise you.

MARIANNE.

Could truth really produce such a cruel alteration?

Old MONTALAIS.

Yes, my children, do not doubt it. In this country, more than others, judgements are made, good or bad, based only on appearances.

SCENE IV.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, young MONTALAIS, LA FLEUR.

LA FLEUR, *slightly tipsy, yelling from the back of the stage.*

Hey! Household. Can someone here tell me if this is Monsieur Montalais's house?

Young MONTALAIS, *aside.*

Good Heavens, I am lost! It's the sergeant I've just enlisted with.

Old MONTALAIS.

What is this man? He seems to be a drunken soldier.

LA FLEUR, *backing off.*

Oh, drunk, that's easy to say, but not so easily done, I can assure you. I'd need another ten pints to befuddle me, though I have already drunk six.

MARIANNE, *aside.*

Alas, can a man degrade himself to this point and make himself lose his mind, the most precious gift that nature has bestowed upon him? [*Aloud to la Fleur.*] What do you want, Mister Soldier?

LA FLEUR.

What do I want, my angel? If I had to address myself to you, I'd be more than happy, my little chick. How I would feast on her! I wouldn't take her to my Captain. I would say to him: 'Officer, Sir, I enlist men on behalf of the King, so at least I'm entitled to enlist a women on my behalf.'

Young MONTALAIS, *aside.*

There's nothing more can be done.

Old MONTALAIS.

I beg you, Sergeant, cut it short and tell me who you wish to address.

LA FLEUR.

Who do I want to address, old chap? Not you for sure, my old Mate. You may be a perfect gentleman, of more use in your household than on the battle field. But who is that I see at your side? He looks just like the person I'm looking for....he looked a good chap so I gave him money; he promised to come and find me in the tavern, where I was obliged to get tipsy on my own waiting for him. And it's not honest, is it, to break your word of honour. Maybe the Fellow thought he could escape me: the wily la Fleur is not so silly...[*To the young Montalais.*] So you wanted to make me your dupe?¹² In all faith I thought you were an honest man....How false is false-physiognomy!

While la Fleur is speaking, old Montalais covers his eyes with his balled fists and Marianne cries; old Montalais lets his arms fall to the table, young Montalais runs to his father's side.

Young MONTALAIS.

Oh Father, steady yourself, don't let sorrow overwhelm you. What can I say? Seeing your inevitable danger, and having no money to take you to a safer place, I enlisted.

Old MONTALAIS, *firmly.*

My son, you have acted like a madman. You have a mother, a sister, who depend on you. This just shows that children only know how to act immoderately. How can I help but be touched by your

¹² Throughout the play la Fleur uses 'tu' when addressing young Montalais; it is not reciprocal, either because military ranking or class differences prohibit it. There is a sense in the last scene of the play that the artificial boundaries between the two men have dissipated making them truly equal despite their altered circumstances.

actions; if I loved you less, I would be angry. Consider, my son, consider that only your father's liberty was threatened, and now you have snatched away my son's! Will I be able to save you? Far from me, maybe two thousand leagues away from your poor mother and sister....Montalais, oh my son, what have you done?

Young MONTALAIS.

Ah! My father, you're breaking my heart; it is despair that drove me to act so imprudently.

LA FLEUR, *rubbing his forehead.*

Ah, Ah! What am I hearing? These people here are such honest folk.....This young man supports his poor family. I could give him back his pledge without anyone knowing; he hasn't signed yet with the Captain.

MARIANNE.

Ah, Sir!

Old MONTALAIS.

My benefactor!

LA FLEUR.

I haven't done anything yet, and I don't want to do anything against you others, so you know. I'm not a Pont-Neuf Recruitment officer; I drill men on the cobblestones of Paris to please my Captain. The glory of serving our good King correctly is my principle but that doesn't mean being inhuman and, bust a gut, a good soldier was always generous. In battle I fight like fifty; with the unfortunate I'm as compassionate as a hundred. That is the motto of our good Louis XVI, and he'll manage all right without one man if it helps. I don't know how many of you there are: never mind....I can see a girl who is very kind, an old man who is very unhappy.....*[He rummages in his pocket, takes out Montalais's papers and tears*

them up.] Here, take your enlistment papers; I gave you eight louis, you can pay me back when you're able.

Young MONTALAIS.

Heavens!

Old MONTALAIS.

What a generous gesture! I cannot allow it, this money may not be your own, and your humanity is leading you astray.

LA FLEUR.

What are you saying, my old mate? I know only what I can do or what I owe. That is the fruit of two vines, all that remains of my beloved birthright; I would no doubt have drunk it before leaving Paris. I'd much rather use it to do a good deed, since I've found such a delightful opportunity.

MARIANNE.

Oh Sir, if gratitude could equal this generous action, be assured that there is nothing we would not do to settle the debt we owe you.

LA FLEUR.

There, there, the young lass, don't go on so, or you might fascinate me; your eyes don't lack sparkle. I would visit you every time I pass through Paris, unless a cannon ball does for my fancy; it's a hailstorm that doesn't haggle with even the most honest folk.

Old MONTALAIS.

If God favours the good and punishes the bad, he will spare you this cruel end.

LA FLEUR.

What would a brave soldier care if he died in war, or nestled in his bed?¹³ To die for the motherland is worth more than dying for nothing by one's hearth; I've neither father nor mother, nor wife or children, nor brother or sister. So, here's to war; there's no one left when I'm gone.

Old MONTALAIS.

But your friends?....

LA FLEUR.

Ah! They are dear to me, and as of today I count myself as one of yours.

Young MONTALAIS.

My friend, if I were alone, I would ask for nothing but to follow you.

LA FLEUR.

No, no, stay here; but I insist that you come with me to finish a bottle that I've started.

Young MONTALAIS.

Willingly, my dear friend: alas! it's the least thing I can do to show my appreciation.

LA FLEUR.

What if the good dad came with us?

Old MONTALAIS.

Gladly. [*Aside.*] Can I refuse him?

¹³ For 'nestled' de Gouges uses the word 'douillettement' which in this instance could be construed as a pun on La Fleur's military status given that the word 'douille' means cartridge case.

MARIANNE.

But here's Monsieur la Fontaine.

SCENE V.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, young MONTALAIS, LA FLEUR, LA FONTAINE.

LA FONTAINE, *to old Montalais.*

Are you leaving, Monsieur Montalais? I need to speak to you.

LA FLEUR, *taking old Montalais by the arm.*

You can speak to him tomorrow.

Young MONTALAIS, *pointing out la Fleur.*

There you see the most generous of men.

LA FONTAINE.

I have good news for you.

Young MONTALAIS, *leaping with joy.*

Good heavens! Is it possible? Oh father! Ah, Sir!

LA FLEUR.

Well, leave them both to explain themselves, since he's giving him good news; you'll find out about it later, so let's go and finish my bottle together.

LA FONTAINE.

Monsieur is right. There is nothing to worry about anymore, Montalais. You can go with this soldier.

LA FLEUR, *embracing young Montalais.*

Did you hear, my friend. I'm dragging you off. You won't mind, in your turn, propping me up.

Young MONTALAIS.

But we'll be back soon?

LA FLEUR.

I'll only leave you when I can't speak anymore for when one can no longer drink, or say a word to anyone, then it's time for bed: you've nothing to fear, since he's just been brought good news. Come, follow me, comrade.

They both exit together.

SCENE VI.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, LA FONTAINE.

LA FONTAINE, *to old Montalais.*

That soldier seems to be drunk. How can he be of use to you?

Old MONTALAIS.

He's a perfectly honest man, despite being the worse for wine. My son imprudently enlisted to give me the means to escape the clutches of my creditor. This good soldier, when he discovered our misfortune, tore up his enlistment papers without taking back the money that he had given him.

LA FONTAINE, *aside.*

A plague on the drunkard and his generosity. [*Hypocritically.*] Marianne, leave me a moment with your father.

Old MONTALAIS.

Go to your mother, daughter. Go, my dear Marianne, and comfort her.

MARIANNE, *going*.

Alas!

She exits.

SCENE VII.

Old MONTALAIS, LA FONTAINE.

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

Now's the moment to assure my victory. Let me prepare the old codger for the blow I want to land on him. [*Aloud.*] Your daughter is young, beautiful and wise; if you wished to assist me, I could get her married to a man of quality, very rich, who would bring joy to all the family.

Old MONTALAIS.

What, Sir! What are you saying? My daughter, without doing her any dishonour, could benefit from a much happier fate! Is this not a dream, or a flattering mistake on your part?

LA FONTAINE.

Her happiness, and yours, at the moment, depends on you alone.

Old MONTALAIS.

On me alone! So what should I do, Monsieur?

LA FONTAINE.

Follow my advice, make the most of this man's offers, he's as powerful in his wealth as in his rank. He adores your daughter and burns to marry her secretly, while he waits to be his own master.

Old MONTALAIS.

Me, consent to a clandestine marriage! Can you think of such a thing, Monsieur?

LA FONTAINE.

We see them every day.

Old MONTALAIS.

They are never happy.

LA FONTAINE.

At least accept his services.

Old MONTALAIS.

They would compromise my daughter too much.

LA FONTAINE.

I can see no other remedy to save you from your difficulties.

Old MONTALAIS.

What, Sir! Is this the good news that you needed to tell me?

LA FONTAINE.

I thought it could only please you.

Old MONTALAIS.

I cannot accept it, nor be ungrateful to you.

LA FONTAINE.

What are you going to do?

Old MONTALAIS.

Deliver myself up to the harshness of my fate.

LA FONTAINE, *hypocritically*.

Old fellow, I reproach you yet cannot prevent myself admiring your virtue. Think of your daughter who may, deprived of you, surrender to the weaknesses of her sex. Do not doubt it, surely, she will be pounced on. Be less rigid, and prevent a great misfortune.

Old MONTALAIS.

But I do not know this man, or his family.

LA FONTAINE.

It's the Marquis de Flaucourt, my friend, my student; he only thinks through me, and he's a perfect gentleman. You know him, you've already met him.

Old MONTALAIS.

What, Sir, the young man that you have brought here a few times? His countenance breathes sincerity.

LA FONTAINE.

The very man. I hid his rank from you, fearing it would alarm you. He is wise, a Philosopher, despite his youth, who doesn't want to marry a woman for her ancestors, he wants to take a companion worthy of him.

Old MONTALAIS.

But prejudice....

LA FONTAINE.

Prejudice is idiotic, and not fit for enlightened people.

Old MONTALAIS.

What, Monsieur la Fontaine, is it you that reasons thus, and gives this young man such advice?

LA FONTAINE.

It's because I am in a position to only give him good advice, that I presume to make a man of him and not a person without character. His parents' advice he utterly ignores and mine he follows to the letter.

Old MONTALAIS.

Well that is no reason to congratulate yourself.

LA FONTAINE, *hypocritically*.

What do you mean? They want to make a hermit of him. They are extreme, an excessive devotion stifles nature in them. This piety only suits their age, not a young man of twenty-five.

Old MONTALAIS.

One can be pious at any age: but if the elderly want to force young people to be excessively devout, then the young will find them odious, and it will lead them to be excessively profligate.

LA FONTAINE.

That is precisely the effect they have had on the mind of the Marquis, and it is to prevent these consequences that I want to unite him to your daughter. I am charged, on the part of the Marquis, to take you to a house where everything will be at your command; you will pay your creditor, your children will be happy. Can you reject such an advantageous destiny? You would be a poor father if you refused them. [*Aside, while the old Montalais is thinking deeply.*] He's thinking; no doubt he'll accept; he'd better if he wants his freedom; the officers of the law are just waiting for my signal to seize him.

Old MONTALAIS, *apart.*

I find these advantages odious: let me meanwhile go and consult my wife and daughter. I will find in their wisdom and in their virtue the courage that I lack to refuse them their happiness. [*Aloud.*] Sir, I will be with you in an instant; allow me to go and consult....

LA FONTAINE.

Go, of course you may. All I propose is merely due to the devotion I feel for you and your family.

Old Montalais exits.

SCENE VIII.

LA FONTAINE, *alone.*

Finally, I can begin to hope; things are working out according to my desires. If I once possess Marianne, I am sure of the Marquis; he will sacrifice everything to his passion, and the fortune of this young girl will become the source of my own. What would become of men, like me, who are deprived in society of the advantages that luck distributes haphazardly, if cleverness and industry did not free them from the rigours of fate?

SCENE IX.

LA FONTAINE, A BAILIFF.

THE BAILIFF, *at the back of the stage, looks around and seeing la Fontaine, runs up to him.*

Sir, is it time to take our man?

LA FONTAINE.

No, not yet; it may not be necessary: but stay by the door anyway, and only come in when I have given you the agreed signal.

THE BAILIFF.

That's fine, you'll be obeyed.

He exits.

SCENE X.

LA FONTAINE, *alone.*

It has to be said that circumstances have combined to suit me. This Durand was only making threatening noises and had no desire to lock up the old chap; I've got hold of his debt for very little, and I'll know how to get the best from it.

SCENE XI.

LA FONTAINE, old MONTALAIS.

LA FONTAINE.

So, what have you decided?

Old MONTALAIS.

My daughter is happy with her lot and does not want to change her estate.

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

I'll feign. [*Aloud.*] I can but pity you and praise you.

Old MONTALAIS.

Ah, Sir, it does not make us any less indebted to you for your obliging offers and, despite being forced to refuse them, we are nonetheless grateful.

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

Let me deal the final blow.

He sneezes a few times.

SCENE XII.

LA FONTAINE, old MONTALAIS, a trade WARDEN, several USHERS and BAILIFFS.

The Bailiffs take old Montalais by the collar.

THE WARDEN, *showing him a small white stick.*

I am arresting you in the name of the King, you must follow us to the Hôtel de la Force prison.¹⁴

Old MONTALAIS, *sorrowfully submitting.*

Gentlemen, I will not resist; I am ready to follow you but don't make any noise, my wife is sick, this last blow will finally overwhelm her; let us leave quietly, so that she remains unaware of this event.
He goes to leave, the Ushers [sic] still holding him by the collar.
Alas, here is my daughter!

¹⁴ The Hôtel de la Force was built centuries earlier as a large private residence; it was converted into a prison for debtors in 1780. In 1785 it was renamed the Grande Force when part of it, named the Petite Force, was set aside for female prisoners.

SCENE XIII.

LA FONTAINE, the old MONTALAIS, the Trade WARDEN,
MARIANNE, several USHERS and BAILIFFS.

MARIANNE *seeing her father in the hands of the Ushers, cries out
and throws herself into his arms.*

Ah! Father, I will not leave you, they can take my life rather than
tear me away from you.

Old MONTALAIS *overcome, pushing his daughter away.*

Leave me, daughter, leave me; you have a mother still, look after
her.

MARIANNE *weeping, throws herself at the feet of the Ushers who
are dragging away her father.*

Ah, Gentlemen, let yourselves be moved. See my despair, have pity
on this venerable old man, have pity on my mother who languishes
in pain, this last misfortune will cast her into the grave.

THE WARDEN, *mercilessly.*

It is not within our power. Money? Or prison.

MARIANNE *to la Fontaine.*

Ah, Sir, you who are our protector, will you allow my father to be
taken away like this? See the magnitude of my suffering. I will not
survive such a cruel separation. I can feel my strength ebbing away.
I am succumbing to the weight of our misfortune.

THE WARDEN *harshly.*

Come, come, bear up, Mademoiselle. He isn't lost: you'll be able to
visit him.

They go as if to take him away.

LA FONTAINE.

I share your pain, and if it depended on me..... [*To the Ushers.*]
Gentlemen, allow me just two hours to satisfy this debt.

THE WARDEN.

I consent: but once this time is passed, mind you keep your word.

LA FONTAINE, *gravely*.

I promise. [*To Montalais.*] Listen to me, Monsieur Montalais, and you too Marianne: I believe there is only one infallible way to save you; you must introduce your daughter to well-meaning souls who will give you what you need to buy back your freedom. From now on, Marianne, you must follow me. [*To the Warden.*] And you, Monsieur, I beg you to dismiss your retinue and to stay on your own with this respectable old gentleman. I will be your guarantor.

THE WARDEN.

That will do. [*To the Ushers and the Bailiffs.*] Leave, all of you.

They exit.

SCENE XIV.

LA FONTAINE, old MONTALAIS, the Trade WARDEN, MARIANNE.

Old MONTALAIS *to la Fontaine*.

Is it necessary, Monsieur, for my daughter to accompany you?

MARIANNE.

How can I leave my father in the state he is in?

LA FONTAINE.

Undoubtedly, you must, if you value his freedom. Only you may obtain it.

MARIANNE.

Well then, let us go.

Old MONTALAIS.

My daughter, it grieves me to see you go.

MARIANNE.

Alas, as I leave you my feelings are no less: but I would do anything to save you from the threat of this horrible prison?

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

Excellent, these words give me the greatest hope. [*Aloud.*] Be assured, beautiful Marianne, I only wish for your happiness.

MARIANNE.

Alas!

La Fontaine and Marianne exit.

End of the Second Act.

ACT III.

The set has changed and represents a richly furnished salon.

FIRST SCENE.

THE COUNT, GERMEUIL.

THE COUNT.

Is Montalais returned?

GERMEUIL.

I haven't seen him since this morning, when he left me with pain and suffering etched on his face. I believe, Sir, that this young man is in love. It is a sickness that is so easily caught!

THE COUNT.

Sensitive souls find joy in tender sentiments, when the object of their attachment is worthy of affection.

GERMEUIL.

How can one tell? It's hard enough reading a surly face, how can one see in an attractive one what the heart is feeling! Women are so skilful!

THE COUNT.

They are perfectly fascinating when they are in good faith.

GERMEUIL.

That's all well and good: but there are so few of them.

THE COUNT.

Let's abandon this conversation. Go and see if la Fontaine isn't in the Marquis de Flaucourt's apartment.

GERMEUIL.

I don't believe so for I saw his place all shut up, but I will go and find out.

He exits.

SCENE II.

THE COUNT, *alone.*

I'm impatient to know what la Fontaine could have gleaned about this girl. She cannot be the same person. Marianne's principles are very different to those of the woman he described to me. But what are my hopes? What claims have I? What intentions can I have towards a girl, both poor and of obscure birth. To attempt to seduce her, or to become her husband? I cannot. Would I lose in an instant the fruit of my reason, and become the talk of all Paris? I must make a sure and salutary choice....Let me flee from the capital. A voyage may distract me and efface from my heart the impression that I cannot overcome. I see her, every moment of the day, just as I saw her with my own eyes: the waist of a Nymph, a noble stature, a tone of voice that both charms the senses and enraptures the soul, big dark eyes, a complexion like lilies and roses, red lips, an enchanting smile, natural grace, hand-in-hand with a simple garb that, unembellished, is more seductive than the most glittering of ornaments. That is how this amiable girl appeared before me. Only she had the power to seduce me: but I must distance her from my mind and, in order to achieve this, I must execute my plan.

SCENE III.

THE COUNT, GERMEUIL.

THE COUNT.

Well?

GERMEUIL.

Ah, Sir, you are going to be so surprised!....crossing the Courtyard, I saw several people climbing the concealed staircase that leads to the garden; I climbed hastily, to find myself in their path; but they had arrived at the Marquis de Flaucourt's apartment. I could only see one young person. Ah, Sir, how beautiful I found her! She

seemed unwilling to enter but someone I couldn't see pulled her by the hand, and straightaway the door was closed in my face. I lent an ear and I think I heard this girl saying, in a trembling voice: "But, Sir, where indeed are you leading me?" The voice became more distant and I could no longer hear anything.

THE COUNT.

What are you saying? It can only be la Fontaine or Montalais. This person seemed to be fearful, you believe....I am the master here, therefore it is up to me to ensure that order and decency reigns. The Marquis de Flaucourt is absent, and what you are telling me arouses my suspicion....But don't you hear someone crying out?

GERMEUIL.

Yes, Sir, you're right....Someone is crying out, "Help, assassin."

THE COUNT, *pulling his hat on his head and taking his sword in hand.*

Do not leave here.

GERMEUIL.

But, Sir....

THE COUNT.

Do as I say.
He exits.

SCENE IV.

GERMEUIL, *alone.*

I'd rather be with him: in a melee, two are better than one, but masters, however worthy they are, don't like their bravery to be compromised by that of their servants.

[*He exits?*]

SCENE V.

GERMEUIL, THE COUNT *opening the door violently and holding his drawn sword in one hand.* MARIANNE *faints into his arms, her hair disordered, her fichu torn and falling off her shoulders, and her face rouge-less.* THE COUNT *throws aside his sword and takes his hat in his hand.*

The rascals have fled, but they won't escape my pursuit. [*To Germeuil.*] Quick, an armchair. [*To Marianne, sitting her down.*] Madame, don't be afraid. Your wicked aggressors are unknown to me. You were coming out of the Marquis de Flaucourt's apartment and I saw you only. Can I ask why you were crying out, why I find you in this disorder and agitation? Who were you with?

MARIANNE, *turning towards him.*

Ah, whoever you are, respect my misery and my misfortune. Everything in this house fills me with misgiving: please allow me to leave.

THE COUNT, *surprised.*

What voice is this!....What do I see? It is Marianne herself....Ah, young girl, as beautiful as you are unfortunate, I was not misinformed.

MARIANNE, *coming to her senses, and greatly troubled.*

How do you know me, Sir. [*Aside.*] What have I just heard? It is he! [*Aloud.*] I am not mistaken, I believe I had the honour of seeing you at Madame de Valmont's. [*Aside.*] What new trouble is taking hold of me!

THE COUNT.

Yes, Marianne; it is at her townhouse that I saw you. [*Aside.*] Alas, it was my ill luck!

MARIANNE.

What will she think of me when she learns of all my ignominy? But, Sir, you seem to be so virtuous, you would not want to expose me and lose me her esteem: I am already too unhappy. Allow me to leave this house, and save me from being persecuted further.

THE COUNT.

Persecuted! But by whom?

MARIANNE.

Sir, that is enough. Please do not force me to enlighten you further. [*Leaving.*] Oh my father, your misfortunes exposed me to such dangers!

THE COUNT, *aside.*

Her father! [*Aloud.*] Mademoiselle, I will not insist. You leave me in the cruellest uncertainty, but as you wish it to be thus, I will respect your secret. [*To his valet.*] Germeuil accompany Mademoiselle to her home. [*Whispering to Germeuil.*] Examine her lodgings carefully, take all the details, and come back straight away to give me your account.

MARIANNE *bids farewell to the Count with all the modesty of a well bred girl, and goes to leave.*

THE COUNT, *stopping her.*

Allow me to offer you my coach to take you back. You cannot go out in such disarray.

GERMEUIL.

Your horses are harnessed.

MARIANNE.

Sir, I accept your kind offer; it is the only advantage I may take from this house. [*To herself.*] Oh father, there is no hope left to save you. [*To the Count.*] Sir, you are not one to abuse the fate of the unfortunate, and I leave you deeply affected by your honesty.

THE COUNT.

You have no idea how it pleases me that you should trust me in this way.

She exits sadly. Germeuil follows her.

SCENE VI.

THE COUNT, *alone.*

I cannot believe her disarray and her sentiments....I could not insist....Can she be, in effect, as despicable as la Fontaine describes her?....No, no, Marianne is virtuous.

SCENE VII.

THE COUNT, LA FONTAINE, *at the back of the stage, listening.*

THE COUNT, *not seeing la Fontaine.*

She was made to come in by the garden door. What scoundrel can have dreamt up such a daring plan?....It can only be Montalais.

LA FONTAINE, *aside.*

Good, so she didn't name me. Let me blame this adventure on her brother to avoid any elucidation.

THE COUNT, *still not noticing la Fontaine.*

Can he have disgraced the one he loves to this extent, and committed such a outrageous act in the Marquis's apartment?

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

He will dismiss him without wanting to hear him. Let me appear. [*Aloud, while coming forward.*] Sir, no doubt you are unaware of the blackest of all attacks. You cannot imagine the imprudent nature of your secretary's behaviour towards this girl whom I told you was called Marianne. I was finding out about her, and I learnt that Montalais sought her hand in marriage.

THE COUNT.

Why use vile means to possess her when he could have obtained her by such beautiful means?

LA FONTAINE.

That is what I just pointed out to him.

THE COUNT.

Where is he, that cheat, that villain?

LA FONTAINE.

No doubt he fears your presence: he ran off fast enough.

THE COUNT.

Let him be sure not to ever be seen here again, the impostor! How artfully he deceived me! Vice does not wait upon maturity to show itself. To be so young and yet so adroit at wearing the mask of hypocrisy! He must be the most dangerous monster, society must be rid of him....But do you think that this girl was truly seduced by Montalais?

LA FONTAINE.

You can imagine, Sir, that after such a business, they are in this together, hand in glove. I believe, from what he implied, that he has promised to marry her without the slightest intention of doing so. But what I can't forgive, is that he took advantage of my faith in him, by using the Marquis de Flaucourt's apartment, to which I'd given him the keys, as the stage for his wicked desires. This behaviour shows he is a most audacious villain.

THE COUNT.

Ah, how was he able to trick you for so long, you that are so shrewd?

LA FONTAINE.

And you, Sir, who unites wisdom with so much experience, were you not equally his dupe?

THE COUNT.

I admit it: the most learned man whose soul is generous would rather believe in good than evil and will always be fooled by beguiling appearances.

LA FONTAINE.

And, quite often, he will even be unjust in the case of an honest citizen, and will too easily lend an ear to calumny. You must forgive, Sir, my germaneness.

THE COUNT.

You are entitled to accuse me, and I must, in turn, commend you to Madame de Valmont. Your behaviour towards me today has surprised me and raised you in my estimation once more. As a sign of my faith in you, I will charge you to avenge this girl wronged by this villain: he will marry her or die in a prison cell.

LA FONTAINE.

Consider this last notion, Sir, for if you want to do good by this young woman, can you wish her to be his wife?

THE COUNT.

Ah! I am more interested in her than you can imagine, but I will be able to stifle my feelings, and I will find means to save her from the most dangerous reefs without making myself known. I will charge you with a letter for the Minister.¹⁵ How hard it is to use violence against a young man who seemed so virtuous!

LA FONTAINE.

I feel, Sir, all the distress you are suffering. The proverb is too true: a villain often wears the mask of an honest man.

THE COUNT.

Which makes him all the more dangerous: but let us not lose time.
He starts to write.

LA FONTAINE, *aside.*

I sense that he's been captivated by Marianne's charms. The fury of jealousy will fuel the hatred that I already feel for him. Let him be the instrument of my revenge. There is no more hope for me; when everyone makes themselves known I'll have nothing to lose. The Marquis de Flaucourt, jealous of the Count, will be my support, and I'll easily persuade him that he alone was the object of my machinations. I have been waiting a long time for an opportunity to disunite them, and here is one that I will turn to my own advantage.

THE COUNT, *having written and sealed his letter, gives it to la Fontaine.*

¹⁵ Chief of Police.

Go, and don't waste a moment.

LA FONTAINE.

You can rely on my zealous undertaking, Sir. He has cheated me too cruelly for me not to want to see him locked up as much as you do.

He exits.

SCENE VIII.

THE COUNT, *alone.*

I am edified by his honesty. He openly blames Montalais's dealings and abandons him to his sorry fate. But...can Marianne have been guilty of giving in to the demands of that vile seducer?...She loved him and so cannot have been suspicious of him. I should pity her rather than blame her....Though she did seem very indignant....Ah, it must be the effect of love when outraged; I needed to understand her weakness so that I could triumph over my own. I will do the right thing for her, and that will satisfy my heart....Germeuil is taking so long to come back!...Oh, here he is.

SCENE IX.

THE COUNT, GERMEUIL.

THE COUNT.

Well, Germeuil, where did you leave that girl?

GERMEUIL.

At her lodgings in a neglected area, near the Gobelins barrier...Here is what I learnt...Unpleasant looking men were on her doorstep, I asked them if they knew this girl. They answered that they had only known her for two hours, and that they were posted there to arrest her father, whom they were about to imprison for debt.

THE COUNT.

What are you saying? Perhaps he is an honest man, a father more pitiful than guilty. If there is time, let's go and tear him from the misfortune that threatens him. You say it is a case of debt?

GERMEUIL.

Yes, Sir, for that and nothing else. I must tell you that I saw with the Porter a young girl crying and asking for your secretary.

THE COUNT.

No doubt another of his victims.

GERMEUIL.

I don't think so. She seems too young and too innocent. I took her up to your antechamber. Do you wish to see her?

THE COUNT.

Time does not allow me to. I am flying to save these unfortunates: but I charge you to interview her and find out from her all the facts you can so that I may be informed in full about this horrible Montalais's odious behaviour.

GERMEUIL.

Leave it to me, Sir. I was pretty certain that this silly little thing could instruct us. That is why I kept her here.

THE COUNT.

Do you think my coachman will remember the exact place?

GERMEUIL.

Oh, I guarantee it, Sir. He used to lodge in the same house.

THE COUNT.

That'll do. [*He goes as if to leave, and comes back.*] I wasn't thinking. [*He searches in his pockets and gives Germeuil a key.*] Here, Germeuil, is the key to my desk. Bring me a thousand *louis* in notes from the discount Account.¹⁶

GERMEUIL.

Ah, Sir, far be it for me to rummage in your papers.

THE COUNT, *taking back his key and shrugging his shoulders.*

Fair enough, I appreciate your consideration.

He exits, running.

SCENE X.

GERMEUIL, *alone.*

I'm not worried for myself, I'm an honest man but he often gave his key to his secretary, and in all of this who knows what can happen. I don't need to stick myself in where I don't belong.

SCENE XI.

GERMEUIL, THE COUNT.

THE COUNT, *crossing the stage, leafing through the notes in his hands.*

SCENE XII.

¹⁶ 'Discount' is meant in the sense of a sum deducted from a promissory note or bill of exchange when it changes hands before its due date. It would suggest that the Count loaned cash to people in exchange for their immature bills. This was a common practice with which de Gouges would have been very familiar as her finances were structured on similar loan agreements between herself and her long-term partner.

GERMEUIL, *alone.*

He's already done it. What an energetic man when it comes to helping those in distress. He is as prompt in doing good as the wicked are in doing harm. Ah, how fitting that such wealth is in his hands! [*He turns around and can no longer see the Count.*] There, he is gone. But here is that young girl. My, she's pretty. That ingénue look suits her a treat.

SCENE XIII.

GERMEUIL, LAURETTE, *not daring to come forward.*

GERMEUIL.

Come closer, lovely child.

LAURETTE.

What do you want from me, Sir? It's not you I'm looking for. I am enquiring after Monsieur Montalais. A gentleman has just passed through this room, and he said you would give me news of him.

GERMEUIL.

But, in order to give you his news, I'll have to talk to you at least. You seem to me to be quite uneasy.

LAURETTE.

Oh, no more so than any other, but I've always been assured that men are so wicked with young girls that I fear them, you see?

GERMEUIL.

And you don't find Monsieur Montalais as dangerous as others.

LAURETTE, *naively.*

But he's not a man.

GERMEUIL.

Ha, ha, that's grand! Eh, what is he then, if you please? Perhaps he is a woman in disguise, is that it?

LAURETTE, *with gauche innocence.*

Go on, you're having a laugh.

GERMEUIL.

Upon my word, when I don't feel like one you'd provide it. But who is this Monsieur Montalais if he's neither man nor woman?

LAURETTE.

He is a young lad who is honest, well behaved and very restrained.

GERMEUIL, *aside.*

All this is but a game, and this silly little thing might be more cunning than I imagine; she must surely be making fun of me. [*Aloud.*] Listen here, my little innocent, you are not as gauche as you seem: meanwhile you're very young for this pretty work.

LAURETTE, *surprised.*

What's that you're saying, Sir? I do the work of a good girl, do you hear me?

GERMEUIL, *aside.*

That's as maybe, but let me carry on annoying her, for that's the way to know everything of women. [*Aloud.*] How can I believe you? Would a good girl go looking for boys?

LAURETTE, *laughing.*

Oh isn't he a dear! But what possible harm can he find in coming to fetch people when we need them.

GERMEUIL, *gayly*.

Oh good grief, I'm wrong, I should have known that you wouldn't be asking for him for no reason.

LAURETTE.

My word, Sir, I can't understand a word of what you're saying but I can assure you that if you won't let me talk to Monsieur de Montalais, then I'm leaving. They're impatient for me to return home and I'm not keen on being ticked off for all your pretty nonsense.

GERMEUIL.

Ah well, if you want me to do as you say, tell me how you know Monsieur Montalais.

LAURETTE.

And what business is it of yours? Ah, you seem to me to be very inquisitive. I was warned that I'd be questioned here but although I'm told every day that I'm just a simpleton, I can keep a secret. So you won't find out anything.

GERMEUIL, *aside*.

Well, that's helpful. [*Aloud.*] But when there's nothing to fear there's no point in keeping a secret.

LAURETTE.

But, Sir, I don't fear you, or Monsieur Montalais either.

GERMEUIL, *aside*.

What can I say to that? It's as clear as day, as simple as she seems, she's as duplicitous as any other. [*Aloud.*] And do you know Mademoiselle Marianne?

LAURETTE.

Oh, you're trying to worm something out of me, I can tell.

GERMEUIL.

No, I just want to know if you are acquainted with her for she also came here in search of this young man.

LAURETTE.

What, she came to this very house?

GERMEUIL.

Undoubtedly.

LAURETTE.

Did she leave long ago, Sir?

GERMEUIL.

About an hour ago.

LAURETTE.

Oh, my goodness, I'm so cross that I didn't meet her!

GERMEUIL.

So you do know her? She seems very honourable.

LAURETTE.

Oh, I'll say; she's a kind girl who loves her father, and is grief-stricken by what has just happened to him.

GERMEUIL.

And this Monsieur Montalais that you keep asking for, isn't he interested too?

LAURETTE.

Oh, indeed, very much. We are all very affected.

GERMEUIL, *aside*.

There can be no more doubt, that Marianne is our Secretary's mistress. [*Aloud.*] That'll do. Monsieur Montalais is not here at the moment but when he returns I'll send him to you right away.

LAURETTE.

I'll be much obliged, Sir; I am your servant.

She goes to exit but heads the wrong way and comes back on stage.

GERMEUIL, *assuming Laurette has gone*.

I'm beginning to see it all clearly. The Count will end up marrying them, and if this young man's only fault is to love, he'll doubtless forgive him. [*Noticing that Laurette has not gone.*] Where are you going, Mademoiselle?

LAURETTE.

I'm lost. I can't find my way out.

GERMEUIL.

Come along I'll show you to the door.

LAURETTE.

I thank you kindly, Sir.

End of the third Act.

ACT IV.

The scene changes and represents the Montalais's lodging; same set as in the second Act. As the curtain rises, Marianne is sitting, her head bent over a table, as someone in a faint; old Montalais and his son are around her trying to help.

FIRST SCENE.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, young MONTALAIS.

Old MONTALAIS.

Oh, my daughter, my dear Marianne, come to.

Young MONTALAIS.

But, father, can I not know what happened to her with Monsieur la Fontaine? What was his design?

Old MONTALAIS.

Son, I have no idea. Your sister had only just arrived when you came in with the good La Fleur who took me out of the hands of the Ushers; but, alas, I don't see him come back. I fear he may have compromised himself.

Young MONTALAIS.

If I did not fear leaving you with my sister, in the state she is, I would go and see what has happened to him.

Old MONTALAIS.

She's coming to....Little Laurette is not back. What can be keeping her? Worried about your sister's fate, and seeing La Fleur arrive without you, I sent the child to the Count to let you know of our fears.

MARIANNE, *coming to.*

Where am I? [*Seeing old Montalais.*] Oh, father, the sweetness of seeing you hasn't been stolen from me! What happened to those barbarous men who were exercising their power over you with so much cruelty?

Old MONTALAIS.

The cruel ones, with no respect for my age, dragged me away most harshly: that brave soldier, angered by their conduct, forced them to run away.

Young MONTALAIS.

But, sister, tell us where our protector, Monsieur la Fontaine, took you.

MARIANNE.

Him, our protector!....That Monster! Ah, don't speak to me of that horrible man. Will I ever stifle within me the shame of his abominable project. How he wronged us! How he abused our misery!

Young MONTALAIS.

What are you saying, sister? Explain yourself. Remember that you must hide nothing from us.

Old MONTALAIS.

Of course she mustn't.

MARIANNE.

What are you demanding of me? My duty is to obey you; but, my brother, the favour I ask of you is to despise this man who is as vile as he is dangerous.

Young MONTALAIS.

I understand you, and I begin to grasp his conduct. The traitor! To have forced me to take advantage of the most compassionate man! But he didn't suffer your generosity, to guarantee my resentment towards him; continue unveiling his horrible character.

MARIANNE.

You know, father, by what word this reprobate sought to persuade you. He bought Monsieur Durand's debt.

Young MONTALAIS.

The villain! He got the name from me.

Old MONTALAIS.

How hypocritically he spoke to the Ushers. And the deceitful traitor was able lie to you?

MARIANNE.

Listen to the end. You remember how artfully he persuaded us that people of substance would acquit your debt: he made me get in a coach and carefully shut the doors, in the fear, he said, that the trouble and affliction to which I was reduced would attract the attention of passers by; finally we arrived. He led me to a richly decorated apartment; he made me sit down and left me alone for a few minutes. I believed he had gone to announce my presence to those people of substance: but I saw him come back on his own.

He sat next to me and said: "You have nothing in the world, Marianne, other than a money-making situation that barely covers your subsistence; your father is in irons, an awful misery afflicts your family; you alone can save them from this desperate state." "I, Sir," I said, "by what means?" "Like this" he continued, "I have loved you, Marianne, for a long time; I am not rich enough to offer you a position worthy of you, but I have made a young man fall in love with you, whose only wish is to lavish his treasures on the first object who will humour his desires; he has put me in charge of it: you have only to say: *I accept your assistance*. A townhouse, a carriage, valets and pleasures of all sorts will be at your disposal; but I must be rewarded for the fortune that I am placing at your feet." I listened to his speech as though it were a foreign language, and could not reply, my astonishment was so great. He was going to continue when I broke the silence. "What," I said to him, "Sir, is it by such vile means that you would wish to free my father! Can you believe that should I myself be so vile as to accept, my father would bear it? No, Sir, however cruel our situation, he will endure it with courage, rather than consent to this horrible plot. But I am ashamed to have listened to you for so long, and I will blush all my life to have known you." Unable to contain any more the anger such words had thrown me into, I flung myself at the door, to leave; he stopped me, forcibly.

Old MONTALAIS.

Good Heavens!

Young MONTALAIS.

How awful!

MARIANNE, *continuing*.

He pursued me, furiously. "Very well," he said, "since you are so ungrateful as to disdain the good that I am offering you, I will take pleasure in taking revenge on you, your father and your brother; from this very day I will chase him away from the Count's; from this very day I will drag your father to a horrible prison and, from this

very day, you will surrender to my desires." I don't know if it was my horror at this speech that inspired me with courage, but, the wretch coming towards me, I pushed him away with so much force, that he fell back entangled in the armchairs: straightaway I reached the door crying help, murder, assassin. The villain dared not follow me. A man appeared before me with a drawn sword in his hand. Good God, what a man! I recognised this generous mortal, though I am ignorant of his name; he must be virtuous since he is acquainted with Madame de Valmont. Well, what can I say? Without him, perhaps, that monster would have carried on to the bitter end.

Young MONTALAIS, *furiously*.

The immeasurable horror! I swear, father, that he will perish by my hand, and that we will all be revenged. I run to it.

Old MONTALAIS, *alarmed*.

Stop, my son. I forbid you to succumb once again to this excessive rashness. With this traitor it could put you in more danger than it did just now with that good man.

SCENE II.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, young MONTALAIS, LA FLEUR
tipsy, with a pipe in his mouth.

Young MONTALAIS.

Father he's here, just in time: lets share our news with him, and then I will act according to his advice alone.

LA FLEUR.

Friends, what is it?

Young MONTALAIS, *excitedly*.

A traitor, who for a long while professed to be our friend, plotting the most odious plan, bought my father's debt, had him arrested, and persuaded him that generous people would give my sister the sum needed to acquit this debt: she followed him without suspicion, he dragged her into an apartment in order to assault her virtue! Is it not up to me to avenge this outrage?

LA FLEUR.

Yes, zounds, no one else can.

Old MONTALAIS.

But, Sir, are you considering the danger he will put himself in?

LA FLEUR.

A thousand squadrons, there's no danger, when it's a question of honour. If he dies gallantly, I'll survive him and avenge his death.

Young MONTALAIS.

Father, you hear him. I will not be disobeying you as I'll be commanded by honour. Farewell, good la Fleur; do not abandon my father, until I return....Give me your sword, it will bring me luck.

LA FLEUR.

Here it is. Go fight with the might of four.

Young Montalais rushes out. His sister and father wish to run after him, la Fleur holds them back.

SCENE III.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, LA FLEUR.

LA FLEUR, *stopping them.*

There, there: he'll be back, since he promised you he would. Courage makes one really strong. You're crying! Hasn't he got la Fleur's sword? Eh, wait to hear the end of the adventure before you distress yourselves.

Old MONTALAIS.

Sir, I am a father.

MARIANNE.

Oh, my Brother!

LA FLEUR.

I have never seen my parents cry. I don't know them. They must have been decent people since they created in me a good man. If they still lived, they would have more courage than you. Me, I don't like to see sorrow in anyone: I'm always cheerful everywhere and you're making me sad.

Old MONTALAIS.

Ah well, Sir, we must cede to your advice. I leave the safety of my son to that compassionate being, the Judge of fate.

LA FLEUR.

That is what is called reasoning.

MARIANNE.

If he protects the innocent, if he hates crime, then he must look down on us favourably.

LA FLEUR.

He has never abandoned me, even though I'm a bit fond of the bottle: but drunks must all be good children, since it's said they have a God.

SCENE IV.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, LA FLEUR, an OFFICER, several USHERS and BAILIFFS.

Old MONTALAIS.

Dear Heaven! What's that I see? An Officer!

MARIANNE, *aside*.

Ah! Father, that's it: there is no more hope for you.

LA FLEUR.

Well, well, what new faintness overwhelms you?

MARIANNE.

Alas, Sir, can you not see these men of the law?

LA FLEUR, *noticing the Officer, bites his fist*.

Now we're properly stuck! I don't have my sword. God forgive me, I think it's an Officer, or else it's the devil....But let's not mess about with the law. You can thrash an usher; but an Officer....first you have to speak to him politely.

THE OFFICER.

Is it you, Sir, who rebelled against the King's Men?

LA FLEUR.

Against the King's Men! What do you mean, bigwig?....Are we not all the King's Men?....The only difference between you and me is that you bring fear to defenceless citizens and I bring terror to the armed enemy.

THE OFFICER.

Well, what does that mean?

LA FLEUR.

It means that you are a featherweight, a bird of ill omen, and I'm a decent cove, always welcome amongst honest folk. But I can be fair: I know that it takes all sorts, but when one has a harsh task to undertake, I don't like to see extra cruelty added to it. If I rebelled, it's because your henchmen behaved with needless and unfair violence.¹⁷ The poor man was not resisting in any way, so why mistreat him? Should a man not always feel pity for his fellow man, in his misfortune?

THE OFFICER.

But one must always respect the law.

Old MONTALAIS.

Then, Sir, exercise your ministry, I am ready to follow you.

LA FLEUR.

Miserable old fellow, his submission makes me weep. [*To the Officer.*] And doesn't this break your heart?

THE OFFICER.

If I were his creditor, perhaps I would give him grace.

¹⁷ The original text uses 'aguafils' which I think is a mis-spelling of 'aguacil', a Spanish word derived from Arabic meaning an attendant, or vizier, used to describe those who aid bullfighters.

LA FLEUR.

You're an honest man then and not an Officer.

THE OFFICER.

I admit there might be representatives of the state who merit the reproaches you make regarding all of them, but be assured that amongst us there are some who know how to soften the severity of their tasks in so much as circumstances will allow.

LA FLEUR.

You want to appear kind. But...it won't stop you taking him.

THE OFFICER.

Needs must, I'm obliged to.

Old MONTALAIS, *to Marianne.*

Farewell, daughter.

MARIANNE, *throwing herself around his neck.*

Ah, father, I cannot be parted from you.

Old MONTALAIS.

Daughter, don't forget that your poor mother, languishing in her bed, needs your care.

MARIANNE, *in the greatest sorrow.*

Alas, my heart is torn in two and divides itself between you both.

LA FLEUR, *dreaming and hitting his forehead with his hand.*

Listen carefully, every last one of you: I read, in some almanac, that the elderly were exempt from prison....Oh, yes, it must be in an almanac that I read such a thing, for I've never cast my eyes on the twaddle of chicanery.

THE OFFICER.

What you say there, Soldier, is only too true but it does have a fixed time; you have to be over seventy.

LA FLEUR, *to the old Montalais.*

Well, pater, you must be at least fifty years past it.

Old MONTALAIS.

I'm six months short of being seventy.

LA FLEUR.

So you only owe that term to your creditor. You told me that you had owed him four thousand francs....let me see....let's calculate....how much is a month if we divide up this sum?....A hundred écus are enough to pay what is left.

THE OFFICER.

Your calculations couldn't be more accurate, the problem is making the creditor agree.

LA FLEUR.

Too bad for him, he'll be a fool if he doesn't accept.

Old MONTALAIS.

Generous friend, that's enough, leave me to my fate. I will see my children, and their presence will lighten the load of my irons.

The Ushers take hold of him; Marianne screams and throws herself into her father's arms.

SCENE V.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, LA FLEUR, the OFFICER, THE COUNT, several USHERS and BAILIFFS.

THE COUNT, *clasping his hands and lifting them to the sky, at the sight.*

Oh Lord, what a touching picture! How timely is my arrival to save this unfortunate father! [*Addressing his words to the Officer and the Ushers.*] Gentlemen, how much does this unfortunate old man owe?

MARIANNE, *aside.*

Heavens! What do I hear? I'm not mistaken; it's my rescuer.

AN USHER.

I have the papers on me: four thousand, three hundred *livres* capital and six hundred *livres* expenses, not including the sixty or so *livres* for my men.

THE COUNT, *pulling a wallet from his pocket and giving him the notes taken from the discount Account.*

Here's five thousand *livres* in notes to the bearer.

USHER, *avidly seizing the notes.*

And here are your papers.

MARIANNE, *aside, joyfully.*

What generosity! [*To the old Montalais.*] Ah, father, it is this virtuous man who saved me from the hands of that cruel la Fontaine.

LA FLEUR, *with transports of delight.*

The worthy man! That is what I call a beautiful act!

Old MONTALAIS.

Daughter, maybe he is another seducer; I should not accept his benefits.

MARIANNE, *enthusiastically.*

Father, you are wrong; he has a noble heart, a compassionate soul and is Madame de Valmont's friend.

Old MONTALAIS, *to the Count firmly.*

Sir, I do not have the honour of your acquaintance, and should not accept assistance, that is as sizeable as it is unexpected.

LA FLEUR.

Happiness does not always come to those who seek, and the devil is not always knocking at the poor man's door.

THE COUNT, *to old Montalais.*

You do not know my heart, venerable old man. Be reassured and banish suspicions that are as distressing to me as they are ill-founded.

MARIANNE.

Ah, father, could you mistake the most generous of men for a mean villain.

Old MONTALAIS.

Forgive me, Sir; a father easily becomes alarmed. Everything about you points to the nobility of your sentiments. But to what do I owe such a great gift?

THE COUNT.

Let it suffice that you are convinced that no ulterior motive has driven me to assist you. Bear with me not limiting my help to such a slight service; accept this wallet, and go and live, with this amiable child, far from the Capital where beauty and candour are ceaselessly exposed to the pitfalls of seduction.

MARIANNE.

Alas, how my heart is penetrated by such a deep understanding!

Old MONTALAIS.

What kind of man are you? Never was there another similar.

LA FLEUR, *aside*.

Well, very few, at least.

THE OFFICER.

It's a rare breed.

Old MONTALAIS, *aside*.

At least you cannot refuse us the satisfaction of knowing our benefactor.

MARIANNE.

Why deprive us of the joy of seeing you, and prescribe that we should go far away from Paris to enjoy your benevolence?

LE COMTE, *aside*.

How can I reply. I will try and conquer the agitation that is taking hold of me. [*Aloud.*] I sympathise with your zeal and my heart is gladdened enough by your gratitude. But I do not make people happy in order to subject them to gratitude. You are young, you are beautiful, doubtlessly you are not viewed with indifference, and your worried father....

Old MONTALAIS, *aside.*

No, Sir, no, my daughter is not the reason that you are so filled with humanity. No doubt my woes were known to you. Is it not enough to offer me freedom, without adding another gift that is too exalted for the indigent state we have long become accustomed to?

THE COUNT.

I am only too pleased to be able to soften your situation.

LA FLEUR, *aside.*

I've seen many extraordinary things in the world but this surpasses my understanding.

Old MONTALAIS, *to the Count.*

You cannot hide your identity from us any longer.

LA FLEUR.

His name should be handed down to posterity like that of a great warrior.

MARIANNE, *to the Count.*

Sir, you will defend yourself in vain; Madame de Valmont will not be able to hide your name from us.

THE COUNT.

Stop, Marianne: I beg you, please make no attempts at all to search out the one who wishes to remain unknown. I will take a long voyage: how would it help you to know who I am? Farewell, venerable old man; farewell, beautiful Marianne. [*Aside.*] Only by tearing my heart can I heal it.

He exits.

SCENE VI.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, LA FLEUR, the OFFICER, several USHERS and BAILIFFS.

LA FLEUR, *stopping old Montalais and Marianne who want to run after the Count.*

You should respect his secrecy. He does good, and wants to remain unknown; that is the way of great souls.

MARIANNE, *aside.*

He's going away forever...so I won't see him again! I'm so unlucky! Let me stifle my feelings; they can only bring me shame and misery.

THE OFFICER.

I leave you most satisfied to see you happy, you appear to deserve it.

LA FLEUR.

A sensitive Officer! I can't believe it. Where the devil did virtue find such a hidey-hole? I've never seen it so lugubriously housed.

THE USHER *to his attendants.*

Gentlemen, we have nothing further to do here, let us leave.

LA FLEUR.

Go, and let's hear no more of you, other than what happened before the creation of the world.

The Officer, the Ushers and the bailiffs exit.

SCENE VII.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, LA FLEUR.

Old MONTALAIS, *tenderly*.

Oh Sublime Providence! To find such auspicious help in those unknown to us; yet how cleverly the perfidious coward, who said he was our friend, planned our destruction long ago! But my son doesn't return; what has happened to him? I fear that our happiness may be short-lived. [*In a strangled tone, and almost faint.*] I succumb to all the sensations that I'm feeling.

MARIANNE.

Father, dispel your fears. Heaven will not have exhausted its benefits on us, in order to condemn us to eternal tears.

LA FLEUR.

Papa, calm yourself, I will bring you the dear child. [*Aside.*] If only I knew where to find him.

MARIANNE, *with delight seeing her brother*.

Ah, father, here he is.

SCENE VIII.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, LA FLEUR, young MONTALAIS,
LAURETTE.

LA FLEUR.

Here he is, the dear friend.

MARIANNE, *running to young Montalais and kissing him.*

My brother!

Old MONTALAIS.

Ah, son! Well, what did you do?

Young MONTALAIS.

Not all that I would have wished: the cruel la Fontaine escaped me. But hear this good news....Madame de Valmont will soon be here. In my despair and taken up with a just revenge, I dared to present myself at her townhouse without having the honour of her acquaintance, other than through all the good Marianne had told us of her. She received me with a kindness worthy of her fine soul: I told her everything. At this narrative, father, she shuddered. "Unfortunate young man," she said, "recognise the extend of this villain's darkness: by the most horrible artifice, he has made you accountable for the designs he had on your sister, and has persuaded the Count that she is one of those vile creatures who have renounced all the virtue of their sex.

Old MONTALAIS.

My daughter! How horrible!

MARIANNE.

Good Heavens!

LA FLEUR.

He's nothing but a big coward.

LAURETTE.

He's a very wicked man. I'm no longer surprised I was asked so many questions at the Count's house. If I had known what was happening I would have told the truth.

Young MONTALAIS.

The crime will be revealed, and the traitor will soon get his deserved punishment.

LA FLEUR.

Yes, virtue must triumph. That is the law of the Supreme Being. He lets the wicked carry on for a time, but, in the end, enough is enough.

Young MONTALAIS.

Father, this benevolent lady did not have with her all the sum required to acquit your debt, but she assured me that she would be guarantor for the rest.

LA FLEUR.

It's no longer needed: it's paid and repaid.

Old MONTALAIS.

Yes, son; see this wallet. I still don't know what it holds.

Young MONTALAIS, *surprised*.

What's that I see? I'm not mistaken. It's the Count's wallet.

Old MONTALAIS.

What, this compassionate man who has just left might be your benefactor.

Young MONTALAIS.

I have no idea who gave it to you but that is his coat of arms.

LA FLEUR.

See what's inside: it's more useful than a shield.

Young MONTALAIS, *opening the wallet and pulling out a few notes from the discount account.*

Nineteen thousand *livres* in notes to the bearer.

LA FLEUR.

And five, that he's already given.....That makes a thousand *louis*. My word, friends, this has not been a bad day for you. I would wish you a few hundred per year.

Young MONTALAIS.

I hear someone.....Ah, it's probably Madame de Valmont.

SCENE IX.

Old MONTALAIS, MARIANNE, LA FLEUR, young MONTALAIS, LAURETTE, MME. DE VALMONT.

MARIANNE, *running towards Madame de Valmont.*

Ah, Madame, you deign to honour us with a visit! What joy for us that the Marquis de Flaucourt's vile agent is known to you!

Madame de VALMONT.

This Marquis is my brother. You may judge, Marianne, whether my motives are strong enough to unmask this liar who has undone him: let's not concern ourselves with him for the moment, but speak of

what concerns you. I have just come from someone, to whom I had made a promise to see you this morning, and who is deeply interested in your fate; I did not meet him, and he will be quite put out by this, I'm sure; he only asks to oblige you, but without being made known.

MARIANNE.

Madame, you are unaware of the goodness that we have just received. But, before anything, be good enough to tell me the name of the Gentleman that I saw the other day at your house.

Madame de VALMONT, *surprised*.

Why are you asking, Marianne?

MARIANNE, *timidly*.

Madame.....I.....Have I been indiscreet in asking you this question?

Madame de VALMONT.

Not at all, dear child....his name is the Count de Saint-Clair.

MARIANNE, *delighted*.

Ah, father, it is he!

Old MONTALAIS.

Yes, it is he; my rescuer, the benefactor of all my family.

Young MONTALAIS.

Let us run and throw ourselves at his feet.

LA FLEUR.

I want to be part of this. I would be so glad to see this good man again, this perfect human, this generous mortal.

Madame de VALMONT.

Why such delight? What has he done that I am ignorant of? Ah, no doubt, some good deed. He is capable of it.

MARIANNE.

No doubt, it is in the Count's house that the perfidious la Fontaine had the audacity to take me, as luck would have it. Hardly had I been returned to my father's arms, where I awaited only death, than this virtuous man called on us just as my unfortunate father was being dragged away. He paid the Ushers; he left us a considerable sum in his wallet. Eh, can one misconstrue this generous trait, and still doubt that it was the Count? But he forbade us seeking to find him out.

Madame de VALMONT.

That is him. I am not at all surprised. I recognise him by this generous and modest trait. But we must tell him how effectively he has used his gifts. Everyone, follow me. I want to have a bit of fun at his expense. He will deny the facts, and my pleasure at his surprise will be greatly enhanced by my introducing you to him. [*Looking at la Fleur.*] Is this the worthy man you spoke of?

Young MONTALAIS.

Yes, Madame, the man himself.

MARIANNE.

Ah, Madame, has my brother told you....

LA FLEUR, *contorts himself and makes very comical signs with his hat.*

Madame de VALMONT.

Yes, I know everything.

LA FLEUR.

Too bad, zounds: and I won't thank him for having revealed something that cost me so little effort, and that I had already forgotten.

Young MONTALAIS.

Oh, Sir....

LA FLEUR.

Zounds, call me friend.

Young MONTALAIS.

Ah, my friend, must we imitate you? The more you seek to efface the recollection of your act, the more it engraves itself in our hearts.

Madame de VALMONT.

One can see probity imprinted on his physiognomy.

LA FLEUR.

In truth, Madame, your courtesy thrills me. Forgive, I beg, your servant so unused to the compliments of amiable Ladies such as yourself. The sincere la Fleur finds it difficult to answer you as you deserve.

Madame de VALMONT.

A brave soldier always expresses himself frankly, and his language is preferable to prepared speeches. I am delighted that this circumstance has allowed me to meet another compassionate and

generous man. There are so few that I thought the Count was the only one with such noble thoughts. [*To la Fleur.*] You will come with me, Mister Soldier. I would be enchanted to present you to a man with whom you have so much in common; he himself will thank me for having made you known to him.

LA FLEUR.

Madame, this honour is too great for your servant; I am merely a simple soldier.

Madame de VALMONT.

A soldier whose thoughts are as noble as yours, becomes the equal of the highest ranking men. Come, let's not waste time.

Young MONTALAIS.

Madame, this good man and I will follow you to the Count's home; my father and my sister will have the honour of accompanying you.

Madame de VALMONT.

But I can take you in my carriage.

LA FLEUR, *whispering to young Montalais.*

Politely refuse on my behalf, you know about these things. I'd rather go on foot, it will do me good to be in the fresh air. Tell me, am I still a bit tipsy?

Young MONTALAIS.

Hardly at all anymore, and the walk will clear your head.

LA FLEUR.

It's all the same to me. You don't know why I'm following you! It's to have the pleasure of cutting off that villain's ears if I should chance upon him.

Young MONTALAIS, *whispering to la Fleur.*

Me too, I want to snuff out for ever his need to spread his vileness in the world.

Madame de VALMONT, *to young Montalais, and to la Fleur.*

What's that you're saying?

Young MONTALAIS.

Madame, la Fleur thanks you a thousandfold, but begs you to allow him to refuse the coach ride. He is used to going on foot.

LA FLEUR.

You're right: that is what I do.

Young MONTALAIS.

Farewell, Laurette.

LAURETTE.

Farewell Monsieur Montalais. Come back soon at least.

Young MONTALAIS.

Rest assured.

LA FLEUR, leaving.

Farewell blonde black eyed one.

Madame de Valmont exits with Marianne, young Montalais and la Fleur follow them; Laurette accompanies them to the back of the stage, and comes back, retracing her steps.

SCENE X.

LAURETTE, *alone, having daydreamed.*

What a change in such a short time! They suffered so many trials and tribulations....And now happiness comes to them from all sides; they'll be quite rich....What's done is done, Mademoiselle Marianne will no longer earn a living....What will become of me if she no longer needs workers?....Oh, no, they are too good, too kind to throw me out....Come, let me go and sit with Madame Montalais, I will share my anxieties with her, and she'll reassure me, I'm sure.

End of the fourth Act.

ACT V.

The set changes and represents the Count's salon.

FIRST SCENE.

THE COUNT, LA FONTAINE.

LA FONTAINE, *aside, whilst the Count is plunged in a deep reverie.*

This miserable silence tells me that he is already regretting charging me with the King's order. These supposed philanthropists only do it ostentatiously: but.....I will take my revenge on him and all his family....For him to be free there are still proceedings to go through, and I will rejoice at every ill for which I alone am the cause. [*Aloud.*] Sir, you seem preoccupied....Perhaps I am disturbing you....I would have retired if you had not detained me.

THE COUNT.

I asked you to come to this salon in order to question you more freely on Montalais.....I was just reflecting on the means that we should use to avoid this violent result and rather bring this young man to his senses by a gentler path. Perhaps he is not as guilty as you think....It is true that Marianne was angry with him, but this fury is no doubt just the effect of outraged love or jealousy.

LA FONTAINE.

That could well be.

THE COUNT.

Can the ingrate have offended her to this degree, without being torn by remorse, and could he ever forget her, if he has the good fortune to be loved by her?

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

I can see from these words how much he himself is taken with her. Ah, how I fear their mutual happiness! And I would have been responsible for it! [*Aloud.*] His is a spoilt character, a corrupted soul who knew how to seduce this girl. I think it would be appropriate to hold him in prison for a few months. If you pardon so easily the scandal that took place in your house he will ceaselessly take advantage of your goodness, and will scorn the moral values you are taking the trouble to instil in him.

THE COUNT.

If I could believe that his feelings were as abominable as you suspect, he would never see the light of day again.

LA FONTAINE.

You have every power over him. He has neither protector nor friends.

THE COUNT.

It is because he has no support that I must offer him a salutary hand. The easier it is for me to punish his presumed guilt, the more I must fear abusing my power. I wish to question him, myself. [*Calling.*] What ho! Germeuil!

SCENE II.

THE COUNT, LA FONTAINE, GERMEUIL.

GERMEUIL.

Here I am, Sir.

THE COUNT.

If Montalais appears, send him to me. By his own admission, I want to know absolutely all the details of such a criminal enterprise.

GERMEUIL.

Sir, I must tell you that he came here about two hours ago; he even asked if you were alone. He was pale, unkempt, without buckles on his shoes, or garters, and with a sabre under his arm. His eyes had a look of desperation.

THE COUNT.

So what was his intent?

GERMEUIL.

Sir, I have no idea. Meanwhile, through his disarray, tears flowed from his eyes and these words escaped him: "The perfidious traitor, the monster! He'll take my life or perish by my hand."

THE COUNT.

And he was asking to see me, alone?

GERMEUIL, *looking la Fontaine up and down.*

Excuse me, Sir, but he was asking after another person.

LA FONTAINE.

That's not hard to guess: it's me, no doubt. I did not hide from him that I was going to reveal to the Count his awful conduct, and he cannot forgive me for it. But I have nothing to fear from him, faithful to all the laws of probity, I defy all his threats.

GERMEUIL, *aside.*

This probity is, I believe, most suspect. [*Aloud.*] Sir, must I send him to you when he appears?

THE COUNT.

No, that is no longer necessary.

Germeuil exits.

SCENE III.

THE COUNT, LA FONTAINE.

THE COUNT.

There is no remedy left for this young man, he is quite lost; I cannot conceive of being so deranged. So be it, he must be punished for his misdemeanour, and I must avenge you, Monsieur la Fontaine. How wrong Madame de Valmont was about you! Since you are an enemy to vice, you must love virtue.

LA FONTAINE.

It is not always well rewarded.

THE COUNT.

Why? Truth always will out.

LA FONTAINE.

Truth! Truth is senseless, indiscreet and often ruins what it sets out to achieve. It's wise politicking that succeeds and makes men great. Frankness and sincerity make us open to hatred and persecution. The greatest talent is to impose through misleading appearances, and *like Madame de Valmont*, to project the most austere morality while being very indulgent in one's own affairs.

THE COUNT.

Your resentment is understandable, but soon you will be disappointed to have thought of it. I leave the fate of this wretch at your disposal. Go and execute the warrant that you have for his arrest, and let me hear no more of him.

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

When he no longer wants it, I'll nevertheless use the power I hold. [*Aloud.*] I will not hide from you, Sir, that it will be hard for me to fulfil this task, but it is a necessary evil.

THE COUNT.

Yes, my friend, and maybe it will produce some good.

LA FONTAINE, *aside*.

His friend! Ah, if he know how far removed I am from one. If only I could prove to him how much I abhor him! Meanwhile, I do feel some satisfaction; I am avenged and amused at his expense, by his credulity and trust.

He exits.

SCENE IV.

THE COUNT, *alone*.

Finally, I have a moment to myself. How my heart is lightened at having been able to do a good deed in favour of this respectable old man! If his daughter acted improperly, it was but for a moment....The old man feared accepting my offer....Ah, Marianne, if you were as I perceived you, no doubt your father would have become mine. But why accuse her? Another got there first, another knew how to please her. I can only pity her and bemoan her fate. However I would like to make her happy; get Madame de Valmont to act, if it is true that she succumbed to the passions of her lover. Her pain made her so compelling! Beauty in tears adds to its power. [*After reflection.*] What am I doing? Miserable! The more I seek to save myself in my thoughts, the more I stray. No, no, it will not be said that a fantasy has made me behave like a lunatic. If I could approve of my feelings, I would applaud my choice, and if my reason could cure me, by leaving Paris, I could at least through this absence, triumph over my weakness. Let me read this famous preface that is sold under the counter. [*He pulls a pamphlet from his pocket and reads.*] All these platitudes are extraordinary....Ah well, all of Paris throws itself at it. Wit only exists in this country alongside malice.

SCENE V.

THE COUNT, Madame de VALMONT, GERMEUIL.

Madame de VALMONT, *aside to Germeuil at the back of the stage*.¹⁸

How calm he is! Germeuil do as I requested: no one is to enter the cabinet.

GERMEUIL, *aside to Madame de Valmont*.

¹⁸ In this instance Madame de Valmont uses 'tu' to address Germeuil, whereas in previous exchanges with him she used 'vous'.

You can count on me, Madame. [*Aloud.*] Sir, Madame de Valmont....

He exits.

SCENE VI.

THE COUNT, Madame de VALMONT.

THE COUNT.

Ah, Madame, there you are! You instructed that I should wait for you.... I suppose you are not receiving anyone this evening?

Madame de VALMONT, *aside*.

He has no idea that I know the reason for my being here. Let me have fun at his expense. [*Aloud.*] You charged me with a very interesting mission. This afternoon I passed by, as you know, not to give you the news that I now bring, which no doubt will grieve you somewhat.

THE COUNT.

You alarm me, Madame. What is so unusual?

Madame de VALMONT.

That another has pre-empted your assistance in favour of Marianne.

THE COUNT.

Ah, that's fine by me.

Madame de VALMONT, *aside*.

I can believe it. [*Aloud.*] I was on the point of leaving to pay her a visit when an unfortunate young man, that I do not know, had

himself announced, and told me that Marianne's father was about to be dragged to prison, for debt. I flew to their aid and what a surprise it was to find joy etched on their faces! And they would be perfectly happy were this joy not tempered by regret for they cannot properly thank their benefactor.

THE COUNT.

And does Marianne seem curious to see him again?

Madame de VALMONT.

Oh, most curious.

THE COUNT.

Most curious?

Madame de VALMONT.

Most curious.

THE COUNT, *aside*.

Gratitude's feeble sentiment cannot satisfy my heart.

Madame de VALMONT, *aside*.

I perceive that he is in love. [*Aloud.*] Well, my dear Count, you are tongue tied....Do you approve of this man whose cruelty allows him to remain anonymous?

THE COUNT.

I cannot blame him. Compassion is only attractive if one makes it mysterious.

Madame de VALMONT.

I cannot agree with you. I think that if good deeds were made public, they would rather improve manners than corrupt them. All peoples erected temples and altars to the passions they deified yet this noble sentiment that creates virtue and sensitive, salutary, compassion has never received any public praise.

THE COUNT.

It is the only virtue that mankind should veil in mystery.

Madame de VALMONT, *animatedly*.

In my opinion Sir, your maxims on this matter are not deeply considered for honestly, you must let me observe, compassionate traits will become more numerous if one recorded for posterity the names of those who fulfil their duties towards their fellow men just as nature has prescribed. An unbridled audience will erect a throne to an actress because she has entertained them; they will offer her a splendid seaborne feast, and will welcome her like Cleopatra. An aerial voyager would see pyramids erected in her honour, but the compassionate man buried without plaudits. No, Sir, no, I do not agree with you, and I would wish that one carved on their tombstones "here lies a compassionate man, here lies the Count de Saint-Clair, who lived only to do good!"

THE COUNT.

What are you saying, Madame? Why make a suggestion to me that I do not merit in any way?

Madame de VALMONT.

Is it possible to dissimulate when one thinks as fittingly as you do?

SCENE VII.

THE COUNT, Madame de VALMONT, GERMEUIL.

GERMEUIL, *aside to the Count*.

Sir, a man saying he is charged with a warrant that can only be executed with your consent asks to speak to you in particular for a moment. He is accompanied by la Fontaine. Should I let them in?

THE COUNT.

I know what it is.

Madame de VALMONT.

Perhaps I am in your way.

THE COUNT.

Not at all, Madame. I have only one word to say. Allow me to leave you for an instant.

Madame de VALMONT.

Go, and leave me Germeuil.

The Count exits.

SCENE VIII.

Madame de VALMONT, GERMEUIL.

Madame de VALMONT.

Germeuil, are they still in the cabinet? And could he meet them?

GERMEUIL.

No, Madame. I have just put Monsieur Montalais and the soldier there as you told me. You have to admit, Madame, that this military gentleman has a very happy face.

Madame de VALMONT.

His heart is even more excellent.

GERMEUIL.

I'm sure of it. But, Madame, I must tell you what is going on. That vile agent....

Madame de VALMONT.

I know everything, Germeuil, and his odious traps will finally be discovered.

GERMEUIL.

Oh good, for the Count has allowed himself to be seduced by this cheat. He is so kind, so ready to believe everyone, that he sees reality in mere appearances.

Madame de VALMONT.

I am not as easily persuaded as he is.

GERMEUIL.

Ah, what a pity that you are not married to each other, Madame! Your children would be jewels.

Madame de VALMONT, *laughing*.

Ah, ah, ah, what a funny man!

SCENE IX.

Madame de VALMONT, GERMEUIL, THE COUNT.

THE COUNT.

It seems, Madame, that Germeuil has the gift of making you laugh open heartedly.

Madame de VALMONT.

Oh, that is quite true. He is so pleasant, even over serious matters, that it would be impossible not to laugh.

GERMEUIL, *aside*.

And that is not such a bad thing. Not everyone can do as much.

THE COUNT, *aloud*.

But I hear a noise in here. What is going on? [*To Germeuil.*] Germeuil, see what is happening in my cabinet, and especially if Montalais asks to speak to me, tell him I'm not seeing anyone.

Madame de VALMONT.

Eh, why?....That is where I was expecting you....Learn....But the noise is getting louder.

GERMEUIL.

I'm running to it.

He exits.

SCENE X.

Madame de VALMONT, THE COUNT.

Madame de VALMONT.

You know then that Montalais, your secretary, is in that cabinet with...

THE COUNT.

Yes, with a soldier who is accompanying him. Monsieur la Fontaine, whom you knew so little, has just alerted me to it.

Madame de VALMONT.

That I knew so little, you say? Virtuous but too credulous man you are going to regret that you were the villain's dupe for so long! But I hear Marianne's cries. Come with me, come.

THE COUNT, *troubled*.

Marianne! [*A terrible noise can be heard in the cabinet.*]

Old MONTALAIS, *from the cabinet*.

No, you will not take him. He is my son, I assure you, and not a seducer.

LA FLEUR, *also in the cabinet*.

If you do not let go of him I will plunge my sword in your bosom.

SCENE XI.

Madame de VALMONT, the COUNT, MARIANNE, *hair disheveled*, old MONTALAIS, *holding on the one hand young MONTALAIS and on the other an OFFICER*, LA FLEUR, *dragging in one hand LA FONTAINE and with the other pointing his sabre at his chest*, GERMEUIL.

MARIANNE, *running to the Count and Madame de Valmont*.

Ah, Madame! Ah, Monsieur! Stop...[*Pointing to la Fontaine.*] Do not let this perfidious wretch perpetrate his horrible crimes. [*Throwing herself at the Count's feet.*] And you, Sir, could you suspect my brother of such odious behaviour without giving him a hearing?

THE COUNT.

What are you saying? Marianne? Your brother! What a mistake!

Young MONTALAIS, *throwing himself at the Count's feet.*

Sir, I do not blame you for this injustice: your impartiality was led astray by the most criminal of men. It was he alone who forced me to pass myself off to you as an orphan. I owe him the good fortune of your acquaintance thanks to the blackest of motives: he distanced me from my family only in order to seduce my sister. He bought my father's debt, to drag him into a horrible prison, and under the pretext that a compassionate hand was going to free him, he brought my sister to the Marquis de Flaucourt's apartment, to try and attack her honour. It's the height of impudence and imposture! He dared to use the awful crime, an abominable project that only he could have conceived, to blacken me in your opinion. I was publicly treated like the worst villain....Ah, the only grace I ask for, is that this traitor is handed over to me so that I can cleanse my outrage in his blood.

THE COUNT, *who has held his head in his hands all the time, stays mournfully silent.*

LA FLEUR.

He won't escape us. I guarantee.

LA FONTAINE, *struggling violently and trying to get out of la Fleur's clutches.*

LA FLEUR.

Gently does it, it's your turn, Rascal. You were a bit too hasty, and now you must give all your atrocities a rest.

Madame de VALMONT, *observing the Count.*

How concerned he is!

MARIANNE, *showing him to old Montalais.*

Ah, father, how his affliction affects me! Yes, his heart is as sensitive as it is generous.

THE COUNT, *attempts to contain his tears and changes his expression.*

GERMEUIL.

He holds back his tears in vain. He is defeated!

Madame de VALMONT.

What is the matter, Sir? You are pale.

THE OFFICER.

What does all this signify?

GERMEUIL.

Listen till the end and you'll find out.

THE COUNT.

I am transfixed....How can I recall all that has happened without trembling? That perfidious wretch used such artifice to deceive me! I dare not cast my eyes on that respectable family. [*He holds his handkerchief to his eyes.*] Horror and tenderness are battling within me and tearing at my soul.

Young MONTALAIS, *approaching the Count.*

Oh my benefactor, stifle your regrets.

THE COUNT.

Stifle them, my friend! I want to bring them to mind ceaselessly. When one has committed such a gross injustice, no expiation suffices....[*Pointing to la Fontaine.*] As for that monster, he is not worthy of your revenge, or mine; I will abandon him to all the rigour of the law, and leave him to this Gentleman, [*Pointing to the Officer.*] to instruct the Magistrate of his conduct. It is up to the law to save society from a monster unworthy of being called a man.

THE OFFICER.

I can see the innocent party has been accused by the guilty. I will report to the Minister, and be assured, Sir, I will not let him out of my sight.

He exits.

SCENE XII.

Madame de VALMONT, the COUNT, MARIANNE, old MONTALAIS, young MONTALAIS, LA FLEUR, LA FONTAINE, GERMEUIL.

THE COUNT, *pointing to la Fontaine.*

Get him out of my sight.

LA FONTAINE, *goes as if to exit. La Fleur blocks his path.*

LA FLEUR.

I'm not taking my leave of him like that.....I've a word or two to say to him.

He exits with La Fontaine and Germeuil.

SCENE XIII.

Madame de VALMONT, the COUNT, MARIANNE, old MONTALAIS, young MONTALAIS.

THE COUNT, *to old Montalais.*

Who is this soldier, venerable man? I saw him this afternoon at your lodgings. [*To Madame de Valmont.*] I see that you were informed about everything.

Madame de VALMONT.

You cannot doubt it any longer.

Old MONTALAIS.

He is a man, Sir, most worthy of your esteem. This morning my desperate son enlisted in order to gain the means to hide me from the hounding of my creditor. This soldier must have come to our lodging to confirm things with him, but as soon as he became aware of our plight he tore up the agreement, and has always refused to take back the money that he had given him. And this money, so he told us, was the fruit of a small portion left to him of his inheritance.

THE COUNT, *to Madame de Valmont.*

Well, Madame, if you compare our fortunes do you find that the little I did could equal the generosity of this worthy soldier? Calumny caused my error with regard to them, but how can I ever absolve myself of all the injustice I did to Marianne and to her brother?

Young MONTALAIS.

Ah, Sir, can you reproach yourself so harshly, you to whom we owe the freedom of my father? You were wronged. Eh, where is the honest man who could be sure never to be misled?

MARIANNE, *to the Count.*

Are we not fully satisfied, given that you respect us?

THE COUNT, *moved.*

Ah, Marianne, what would you say if a more tender sentiment obliged me to offer you the homage that I owe your virtue.

MARIANNE, *aside, troubled.*

Where am I? What have I heard?

They all look at each other.

Madame de VALMONT, *to the Count.*

Explain yourself.

THE COUNT.

Yes, I must now make a public reparation and throw down all prejudices, titles, empty honours, and render to virtue all that it deserves. [*Throwing himself at Marianne's feet.*] I can dissimulate no longer. Yes, Marianne, I adore you. From the moment I knew you, I felt the sweetest, most respectable, passion for you. You alone can decide my happiness by accepting my hand.

Old MONTALAIS.

Oh my daughter!

MARIANNE.

All my senses are overcome by emotion....I cannot bear it. [*She feels unwell.*]

THE COUNT, *holding her in his arms.*

Heavens, her strength is leaving her! What did I say, wretch that I am? Obviously I am not lucky enough to please her.

Madame de VALMONT.

Marianne, my child, would you find your benefactor repugnant?

THE COUNT.

Ah, without a doubt. It must cost her dear to refuse me. I am so unhappy that I could have displeased her.

Old MONTALAIS.

Ah, Sir, my daughter's heart is unknown to you. I perceived her feelings, before we were overcome by your benevolence. Have you considered the differences between you both?

MARIANNE, *revives*.

Young MONTALAIS.

My sister, you are good, you are wise; you would not take advantage of the ascendancy you have over the most generous of men. If he has had the good fortune to please you, sacrifice your feelings to him, by renouncing his passion.

THE COUNT.

How dare you say so?

MARIANNE.

They fear that one day you will regret having elevated me above my station. It is not this elevation that concerns me, may Heaven bless that you are just my equal!

THE COUNT.

What, Marianne, would I have had the good fortune to interest you? Ah, if I have been able to please you, then you will have made me the luckiest of men.

Old MONTALAIS.

This morning, before I knew you, I began to understand my daughter's feeling for you and I was far from believing that one day they would make her happy, or that she would be able to surrender herself to them without offence.

Madame de VALMONT.

Virtue must be recompensed, and the Count, by giving his hand to Marianne, honours his worthy choice.

Young MONTALAIS.

What, Madame, would you give her such advice?

Madame de VALMONT.

Certainly. Marianne's charms and virtues alone can make her happy. I know her heart.

THE COUNT, *to the young Montalais.*

Montalais, stop opposing my happiness by an excessive generosity that I admire, but that cannot alter my resolution. [*To old Montalais.*] And you, Sir, vouchsafe to bestow upon me this dear and worthy object of all my wishes, by becoming my father.

Old MONTALAIS.

I cannot refuse you, but I fear that one day, after wise reflection...

THE COUNT.

Stop, stop, father, I am old enough to know that reason will never make me blush at my choice.

MARIANNE, *to the Count.*

Alas, what fortunate destiny grants me the joy of belonging to you!

THE COUNT.

It is I that must applaud this happy moment....What ho. Someone.

SCENE XIV.

Madame de VALMONT, the COUNT, MARIANNE, old MONTALAIS,
young MONTALAIS, GERMEUIL, *running in troubled*, LA FLEUR,
following him calmly.

THE COUNT.

What news?

GERMEUIL.

Ah, Sir, it is done, the monster is dying.

THE COUNT.

How so?

Old MONTALAIS, *looking at la Fleur*.

Alas, this brave man will have compromised himself by punishing the villain.

LA FLEUR.

Fear not: he lived a coward but is dying a brave man. That proves one can never tell. I was supposed to make a man, but by an unexpected circumstance, on the contrary, I have unmade one.

THE COUNT.

But how did you manage?

LA FLEUR.

Zounds, by everyday means. I followed him into the street: he thought to escape me. "Here," I said to him, "scoundrel, defend yourself." Straightaway he furiously put his hand to his sword, and I made him fight for a few moments, then tired of his horrible features, I nailed him to the wall. He was not long for this world, and I said to him, as I left, farewell until the resurrection.

Young MONTALAIS.

But is there nothing to fear?....

THE COUNT.

No, be assured, I will take it upon myself. The Heavens are fair. [*To la Fleur.*] Embrace me, my friend. Today you have achieved two great deeds, on the one hand you saved a poor man, on the other you punished a criminal. If your military exploits are as glorious, how courageous you must be, every day of your life will be marked by new laurels, and noted for a benevolent act.

Madame de VALMONT.

Ah you are right, Count. Your story, and this brave man's, should be recorded for posterity. But perhaps your good deeds will be viewed as fibs given the corrupted state of our manners this century.

LA FLEUR.

You tell me such beautiful things that I am most embarrassed to reply: if I did well, then I need no other recompense, and it's not worth talking about me when I am no more.

THE COUNT.

Ah, my friend, you will never be forgotten.

LA FLEUR.

Another can do even better than me.

Young MONTALAIS.

That's impossible my friend. Such virtuous men, like those with great talent, are rare, and maybe ten centuries will have to pass before another like you, or the Count de Saint-Clair, can be found.

THE COUNT.

Come, let us abandon the merits of great men, when they only do their duty, and allow me, in this instant, to only take care of my own happiness, by getting married. Germeuil, go and tell my Notary that he should come here instantly.

He gives his hand to Marianne, and old Montalais gives his to Madame de Valmont, and they exit after Germeuil.

LAST SCENE.

Young MONTALAIS, LA FLEUR.

LA FLEUR.

What does this wedding mean?

Young MONTALAIS.

The Count is to marry my sister.

LA FLEUR.

Very good. I am delighted.

Young MONTALAIS.

Yes, my dear la Fleur.

LA FLEUR.

Take note, you're going to become a fine fat Gentleman.

Young MONTALAIS.

Ah, I'll never change; I'll always be friends with my dear la Fleur.

LA FLEUR.

There, I'm sure of it. Come, a thousand squadrons, three cheers for joy, and no more rascals to trouble your prosperity.

End of the fifth and last Act.

Read and approved on 8 February 1789. SUARD.

Approbation and permission to print viewed; Paris, 14 February
1786. DE CROSNE.